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The Twilight Program: A Phenomenographic Study
Chanda Crawley
Kennesaw State University
May 2020

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of
Education in the Bagwell College of Education

Dr. M. Leigh Funk, Chair
Dr. Susan Stockdale, Committee Member
Dr. Mark Warner, Committee Member

Abstract

Alternative schools are an important concept in current education. This research describes the qualitatively different ways in which student's experienced an alternative program, like Twilight. In these phenomenographic inquiry two current students, two Twilight graduates, and four Twilight teachers discuss the qualitatively different ways that students' experience Twilight. The analysis yielded an outcome space of three qualitatively different ways of experiencing Twilight 1. *Culture*, 2. *Self-efficacy*, and 3, *Teacher impact*. Based on the findings of this research, the recommendation includes studying the shifting role of administrators in alternative education.

Keywords: phenomenography, at risk student, blended learning, culture, self-efficacy, teacher impact, student-teacher.

Dedication

PJ, you are my best friend and without your support I would not have accomplished this task.

You are priceless to me. This is for Carrie Mae Birdsong who has never left my heart.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Cyntoria, a high school student is currently pregnant with her second child, and she and her mom are fighting at home. Due to lack of affordable childcare for her baby, she is having trouble keeping up in school because of her constant absences. Cyntoria's mother cannot miss any more days of work and her older sister has multiple children of her own to care for. Her mother is upset that Cyntoria allowed herself to get pregnant again; and Cyntoria is frustrated that her mother does not support her decisions. In Cyntoria's mind, she is grown, having split time between school and working to help support the family for years. At 17-years-old, she is growing more determined to leave home and move in with her boyfriend despite their 23-year age difference. She is facing true challenges at home and the school is calling daily about her attendance.

It is September and she has already accumulated over 40 absences in her classes. Her teachers and friends believe that she does not want to attend school, but that is far from the truth. She has had no one to watch her baby and so she has missed school. She enjoys socializing with her friends and having challenging class assignments. How is she ever going to graduate with her responsibilities? She does not want to drop out of school, but her current situation is making school a difficult decision. Her mother is supportive when she needs Cyntoria to work but is less interested in helping when it comes to school. How is she going to improve her situation without help? Could she attend the district's Performance Learning Center, which is a day program that allows students to self-pace their classes? At the Performance Learning Center credits are awarded through course completion on a web-based educational platform. The courses are state-aligned, and

students still have to complete all state required exams; however, this could be a quicker method to course completion. Unfortunately, affordable childcare is not available. She does not intend to drop out of school; however, with limited options, it might be the best decision for her.

Statement of the Problem

Regrettably, high schoolers throughout the state have faced decisions such as Cyntoria's. High school dropouts have a difficult problem facing our society (Bäckman, 2017). As demands for a more educated workforce continue to climb, the economic and social ramifications for those who failed to complete high school have increased. There are three distinct costs for not completing high school: 1) the social cost, 2) the personal cost, and 3) the cost to the community (Young-sik, Joo, & Ssangcheol, 2018; Belfield, 2014; Sum, Khatiwade, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2009; Orfield, 2004). High school dropouts experience a "social cost," because they have a higher chance of suffering from mental health issues, involvement with criminal activities, and/or incarceration (Bäckman, 2017; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Campbell, 2015; Levin & Rouse, 2012; Rumberger, 2011; Swanson & Editorial Projects in Education, 2009; Belfield & Levin, 2007; Catterall, 1987).

Tyler & Lofstrom (2009) stated that lower lifetime earnings was the expected cost in failing to complete high school. On average, people without a high school diploma earn 35% - 30% less than those people who graduated with a high school diploma (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Freeman & Simonsen (2015) stated that dropouts had higher unemployment rates and were less likely to benefit from employer-provided pension plans and/or health insurance. Thus, poorer health and higher health spending were additional costs that dropouts face.

High school dropouts have large economic consequences on their community. Individuals who dropped out of high school had a higher rate of unemployment, were more likely to be on public assistance, and had less earning potential than their peers who completed high school (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Levin & Rouse, 2012; Rumberger, 2011; Swanson & Editorial Projects in Education, 2009). Tyler & Lofstrom (2009) report that nearly half of single mothers receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) were high school dropouts. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program provides grant funds to states and territories to provide families with financial assistance and related support services (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, 2019). Welfare costs would fall approximately \$1.8 billion if all welfare recipients who were high school dropouts were high school graduates instead (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

A common way to report dropouts is through the status dropout rate, which represents the percentage of 16–24 year olds who are not enrolled in school, have not earned a high school diploma, or a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017).

Table 1.

National Drop-Out Three-Year Trends

Year	African American	Hispanic	White	Overall
2013	7.3%	11.7%	5.1%	6.8%
2014	7.4%	10.6%	5.2%	6.5%
2015	6.5%	9.2%	4.6%	5.9%
2016	6.2%	8.6%	5.2%	6.1%
2017	6.5%	8.2%	4.3%	5.4%

Note: U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2019

Bibb County's dropout rate of 5.8% in 2015, shared similarities with the national dropout trend. According to race and ethnicity, African American youth had the lowest dropout rate at 5.3%, White youth at 8%, and Hispanics had a dropout rate of 8.3%. In 2015, 99% of the students in Bibb County were eligible for free/reduced lunch (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2017). Bibb county even shared similarities with the National Drop-out Trends in its demographic breakdown with Hispanic youth having a higher dropout rate and a similar overall rate.

Georgia's response to the dropout problem led to the development of two initiatives: -graduation coaches and early childhood education programs. Georgia Department of Education (2008) created the Graduation Coach Initiative in 2006 as one strategy to address at-risk students off-cohort. Saltiel and Reynolds (2001) stated that a cohort was a group of individuals [who] enter a program at the same time, proceed through all classes, academic requirements and complete together. Therefore, students who were off-cohort were targeted for additional assistance to get back on-cohort to graduate with them. This initiative also increased the funding and availability for early childhood education programs as another prevention to address dropout concerns (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

Graduation Coach Initiative

The Graduation Coach Initiative was an intervention that addressed the barriers that hindered graduation growth (Georgia Department of Education, 2009b). Georgia's Department of Education (2009a) identified barriers to graduation and concluded that an initiative that focused on at-risk students was necessary. Graduation coaches were responsible for the early identification of at-risk high students and to have provided

intervention strategies that helped with their academic success and graduation.

Graduation coaches used a profile form from the National Dropout Prevention Network that listed the characteristics of potential dropouts and helped to identify the at-risk high school students (Georgia Department of Education, 2009b). Graduation coaches acted as mentors that provided personal attention and encouragement to struggling students.

Graduation coaches helped students make the transition from middle to high school with the aim of allowing for a more positive experience for the students (Georgia Department of Education, 2009a). The coaches assisted with the transition by being the mentor or trusted adult in the high school for the transitioning students. Often students felt lonely and forgotten in a new, larger setting, but the graduation coaches helped to ease that transition by targeting at-risk students and developing relationships (Stanley & Plucker, 2008; Roderick & Camburn, 1999). Also, graduation coaches provided general academic tutoring, arranged tutoring, and aided students in recovering credit from failed courses. From 2006-2008, Georgia funded the Graduation Coach Initiative as a line item, which meant school districts had to use the money for graduation coaches. Governor Perdue, in the school year 2008-2009, moved the \$40 million into the general pot of money for schools that gave districts the choice to continue funding for graduation coaches (Associated Press, 2010, para. 7). Districts had to choose whether hiring graduation coaches was financially feasible considering budget restricts. Additional budgetary constraints reduced funding for the Graduation Coach program in 2010-2011 which caused many districts to eliminate the position (Associated Press, 2010, para. 8). By 2015, the Graduation Coach program was no longer a funded state initiative. Districts allowed high

schools to use discretionary federal funds (grants or Title I fund) to continue staffing the position.

Early Childhood Programs

Another strategy highlighted by the National Dropout Prevention Center (2008) and Georgia Department of Education was the early identification of students who were at-risk of dropping out of school due to their socio-economic background. Head Start, comprehensive child development program that provides children with preschool education, health examinations, and nutritious meals. This is a federal program that targeted students from very low-income families who were at risk of entering school unprepared. Early childhood programs were funded locally through the state and provided a year or two of education prior to kindergarten for children ages 3-4. Early childhood programs vary by state and do not have standardized characteristics (Jenkins, Farkas, Duncan, Burchinal, & Vandell, 2016). For these reasons, the effects of any early childhood programs have not been generalized to nationwide programs. Despite the differences in characteristics and lack of standardization resulting from meta-analysis (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, & Barnett, 2010) correlational studies (Howes et al., 2008; Huang, Invernizzi & Drake, 2012) indicated that students benefited from state early childhood programs.

Bridgeland et al. (2006) implemented a research study with 16-25-year-olds who dropped out of school. According to the study, 45 percent of the participants felt that they did not acquire the prerequisite skills in the prior levels necessary to achieve academic success in high school. Schargel and Smink (2001) stated that early intervention programs should focus on reading and writing. Since the ability to read and write was the nucleus of

student success, it was crucial that students had access to effective reading and writing programs early and throughout their education.

Research Question

What are the qualitatively different ways in which students' experience the Twilight program?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine what it was like to participate in an alternative education program, like Twilight, and explore how that experience impacted the student perceptions of themselves and their vision of the future. This study sought to discover the qualitatively different ways in which students experienced the Twilight program. As part of this study, characteristics of self-efficacy and resilience were studied to gain an understanding of how students perceive themselves since enrolling in the program.

Significance of the Study

Twilight offered the possibility of several positive effects. In addition, the program showed evidence of the importance of student-teacher relationships to student self-efficacy and resiliency. This study provided at-risk students with the opportunity to give feedback about an alternative education program. This study was also useful to provide aid and recommendations to schools and/or districts interested to develop a Twilight program. Local school administrators, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders were informed of the effectiveness of the Twilight program. This study assisted administrators in making sound decisions to enhance the program or to attempt a different intervention if Twilight is determined to be ineffective.

While there was research on dropout prevention programs (National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, 2015a), alternative education (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015; Grant, 2011; & Kallio & Sanders, 1999), and a Twilight program (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009), there was a gap in the literature for a phenomenographic study based on students' perception of themselves and their future resulting from participation in an alternative education program like Twilight. Continued research on programs like Twilight has promoted more of these programs across the nation. The results of this study have encouraged school personnel to further explore the concept of alternative education programs and to utilize student feedback concerning these programs.

Local Context

Bibb County School District is located within Macon-Bibb, Georgia and has approximately 26,278 students enrolled in PK- 12th grade in 32 public schools and 2 charter schools. Macon-Bibb has a population of 156,000 with a median household income of \$37,150 annually with 28% percent of the population living in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016).

Twilight was created in April of 2014, in response to the elimination of the Graduation Coach Program and a continuing need to increase the graduation rate. This program allowed students another opportunity to earn their high school diploma. Twilight was a night school program for students at risk of dropping out. It was designed to cater to their time restrictions and educational needs. The program was targeted towards the students on the verge of dropping out or being removed from their traditional high schools. These students traditionally had education gaps and poor self-confidence.

The purpose of the Twilight program was to help decrease the number of dropouts in Macon-Bibb County and increase the high school graduation rate. There had not been any studies to determine if Twilight had helped with the drop-out rate, but Twilight had helped numerous students graduate; and this was evident by the increased graduation rate for the district (Hartley, 2018). Many of the students faced challenges in the traditional high school setting. Twilight offered them an opportunity to complete their high school diploma in an alternate setting, and to continue to receive the benefits of a traditional high school student. Twilight offered students that were off cohort, on target to finish later than their peers, an opportunity to get caught up and students that had dropped out another opportunity at a high school diploma. Individuals that may finish earlier or later than their anticipated graduation date were considered off-cohort (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). In its most basic sense, Twilight was an opportunity for students between the ages of 16-20 to get a high school diploma through a non-traditional manner.

The philosophy of the Twilight program was to offer more options to students who had not completed the educational requirements to obtain a high school diploma. The students in the program were geared to graduate but their circumstances required them to need more flexibility in their education. Twilight offered students flexible options while allowing them to maintain the benefits of a traditional high school student. The program ran from 3:30pm to 7:30pm and allowed students to remediate their high school courses. Twilight students were still allowed to attend prom, senior activities, and all other high school functions of a traditional high school. This allowed the Twilight students to have some sense of normalcy as a high school student even though they were attending school at a different time. The program employed a blended learning model that included the use of

Edgenuity (a web-based program) and small group conferencing with a teacher to help students earn their credits and prepare for their End-of-Course (EOC) tests.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework aligns the entire research process (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012). A conceptual framework describes why the topic under study is significant, and why the methodology used to investigate the topic is suitable and thorough. Ravitch and Riggan (2017) state that conceptual framework functions as the argument for the research's significance.

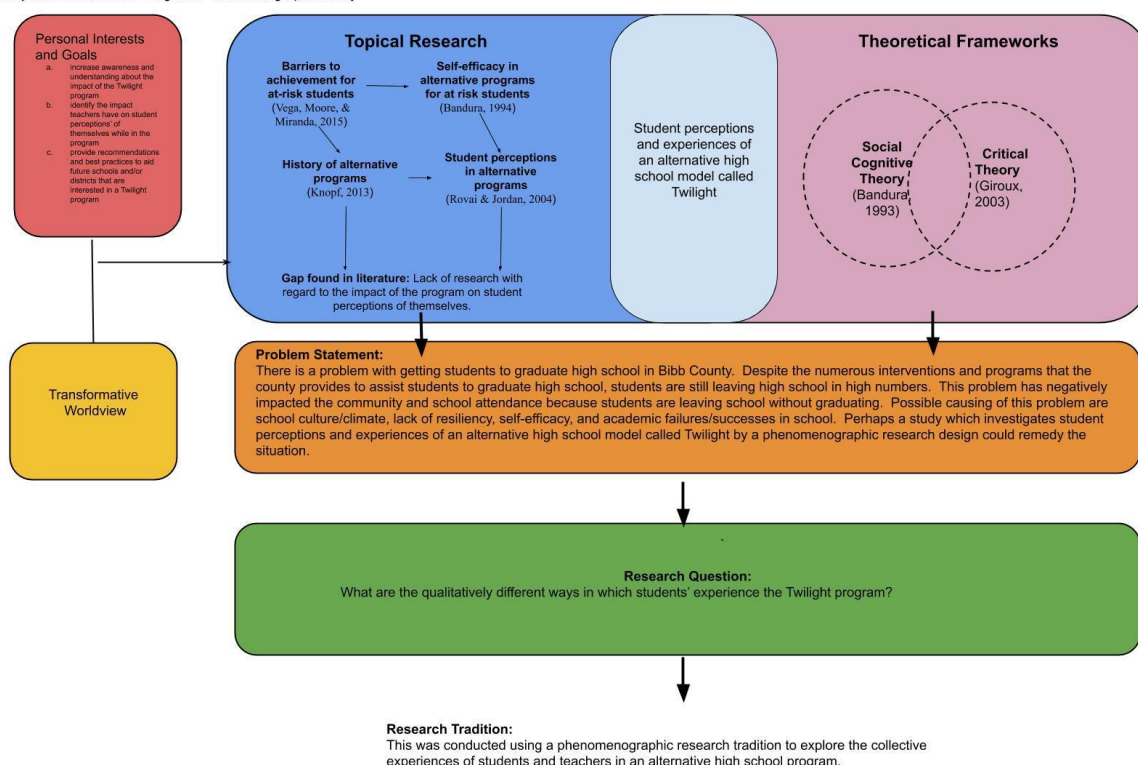
The elements of a conceptual framework proposed by previous authors are personal relations with topic, worldview or positionality, and the literature review (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). The literature reviewed also has sub-components of topical research and theoretical framework. To support the relationship between the conceptual framework and the methods employed, the problem statement, research questions, and a research tradition is added to this conceptual framework based on the Hopscotch Model (Jorrín-Abellán, 2019). Ravitch & Riggan (2017) state that the conceptual framework serves as the foundation of the study, communicating the reason and basis for the research while emphasizing the methodological rigor.

The conceptual framework for this study (*Figure 1 Conceptual Framework*) uses Ravitch and Riggan's (2017) definition and elements to aid in the development of the conceptual framework. Figure 1 is a graphical illustration of the key elements in the conceptual framework.

Figure 1.

Elements of the Conceptual Framework of the Study

Conceptual Framework: Twilight: A Phenomenographic Study



A suggested structure for conceptual framework contains the following elements. Personal interests and goals reflecting the researcher's beliefs and motivation (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). The researcher's motivation for conducting this study are: (a) to increase the awareness and understanding about the impact of the Twilight program; (b) to identify the impact teachers have on students' perceptions' of themselves while enrolled in the Twilight program; and (c) to provide recommendations and best practices to aid future schools and/or districts that are considering a program like Twilight.

Next, is the identity and worldview of the researcher. The shaping and influence of the study is dependent on the researcher's position relative to the research, and the researcher's own interests, beliefs, biases and understanding of the world (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). For this study, the researcher brought a transformative worldview. A

transformative worldview places importance on the study of the lives and experiences of diverse groups that are usually sidelined (Creswell, 2013; Merten, 2010). It is viewed as an action paradigm that supports the value of encouraging community and individual empowerment to support internal and external changes. Transformative worldview examines how power structures enable social injustices to influence individuals and how they steer their social realities (Creswell, 2013; Merten, 2010). Thus, the goal of research within a transformative worldview is to move individuals from the margins towards positive social change.

Ravitch & Riggan (2017) state that a literature review is conducted to identify the pertinent and demanding foundational research for the topic being studied and to identify the theoretical framework. Topical research is the term used by (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017) to describe most research in literature reviews. The topical research aids in framing the study, identifying research gaps, and analyzing different methodological approaches on the explored topic (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). For this study, in the literature review the topical research focused on barriers to achievement for at-risk students, self-efficacy in alternative programs for at risk students, history of alternative programs, and students' perceptions in alternative programs. The theoretical framework is a theory or collection of theories that support the conceptual framework and study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). The theories that supported the theoretical framework of this study were social cognitive theory and critical theory.

Review of Relevant Terms

Several terms were important to define within the context of this study.

Understanding the terms helped others associate with the Twilight program.

At risk student: A student who has a high probability of failing academically or in danger of dropping out of high school (Lemon & Watson, 2011).

Blended learning: A hybrid instructional model where the content and most of the curricula are delivered in an online platform. Teachers provide on-site support on a flexible as needed basis through one-on-one tutoring and small group sessions (Staker, 2011, p.7).

Cohort : "A group of individuals [who] enter a program at the same time, proceed through all classes and academic requirements together, completing together, thus creating an atmosphere for learning in which a synergy is present and the learners' effectiveness is increased" (Saltiel & Reynolds, 2001, p. 6).

Status dropout rate: Represents the percentage of 16-24 years old who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED) (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

General Equivalency Diploma (GED): Is equivalent to a diploma awarded to students who complete a secondary education program (American Council on Education, 2008).

Inner city: Schools that are in metropolitan areas and have more than half of their students on free or reduced-cost lunch. These schools are indicative of a low socioeconomic status and are typically defined as inner-city (Nye, 1991).

Phenomenography: To study the diversity of participants' understandings of a phenomenon (Marton, 1981).

Traditional public school: A traditional public school is maintained through public funds for the education of the children of a community or district (Holland, 2002).

Self-efficacy: refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments. Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment. (Bandura, 2000)

Motivation: an internal process that makes a person move toward a goal (Bandura, 1998)

Summary

High schools in Bibb County, GA are having a difficult time getting students to graduate. Despite numerous interventions and programs that the county provided to assist students to graduate high school, students were still leaving high school in high numbers. This problem had negatively impacted the community and school attendance because students were leaving school without graduating. Possible causes of this problem were school culture/climate, lack of student resiliency, student self-efficacy, and student-teacher relationships (Bäckman, 2017; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Campbell, 2015; Levin & Rouse, 2012). Perhaps a study which investigated student perceptions and experiences of an alternative high school model called Twilight by a phenomenographic research design could remedy the situation.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This literature review examined topics relevant to reviewing student perceptions of alternative high school programs, including research on resilience and self-efficacy. The researcher explored previous topics such as blended learning and the impact of teachers in alternative education. The researcher searched various literature databases from Kennesaw State University Online Library for published articles in online journals such as ERIC and evidence-based databases such as ProQuest for systematic reviews and abstracts. Keywords searched included *alternative education and resiliency*, *alternative education and self-efficacy*, and *alternative education and teachers*. The researcher used the Kennesaw State University Online Library System to access most of the research for the literature review to ensure the use of scholarly articles. Currently, limited research had been published regarding student perceptions of an alternative program such as Twilight. How well the students understand themselves through the program helped with determining the funding and value of the program.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theorists believe that human behavior can be explained by understanding the thought process. This theory delves into the thought processes based on intrinsic and extrinsic forces that may impact the student. Thus, behavior is reinforced through observational learning and that positive or negative reinforcements changed a person's behavior. Bandura (1994) determined that children begin to form opinions about their intellectual capacities and when they perform below their peers, they feel insecure or that they believe they lack basic intelligence. According to Bandura's theory, learning

depended on the interaction of three factors: 1. environment, 2. the individual, and 3. the behavior. Social cognitive theory “states that people must develop skills in regulating the motivational, affective, and social determinant of their intellectual functioning as well as the cognitive aspects” (Bandura, 1993, 136).

Bandura (1994) proposes that learning transpires through lively and multi-directional interactions between an individual’s personal factors (resiliency, student perceptions, and self-efficacy), environment (school culture and blended learning), and behaviors (academic failures and successes). Exploring the students’ perceptions of themselves during or after the Twilight program via a social-cognitive lens provides understanding into personal and environmental factors that may positively or negatively influence a student's academic success or failure. Observational learning, a key factor in the theory, indicates that learning occurs by observing the actions of others, mediating or reviewing their actions, then imitating them. Internal self-regulation helps to mediate the learning that develops from the social context which leads to a dynamic interaction between the person, behavior, and social context.

Critical Theory

Critical theory emerged from the Frankfurt School in Germany during the mid-twentieth century as a desire to understand the psychological aspects of oppression and exploitation inherent in society. As such, critical theory departs from understanding or explaining society and instead promotes a social theory emphasizing the use of critique as the preferred method of investigation (O’Donoghue, 2018; Kim & Taylor, 2008; & Giroux, 2003). It provides an examination of the contradictions of society rather than social harmony. Critical theorists look at the contradictions of society as the beginning for

developing forms of social inquiry that question what is real versus what should be (Giroux, 2003). Critical theory is a key component to address the research question because it helps the researcher to understand what happened in Twilight versus what should be happening and question who benefits. Thus, the focus of this study's analysis was what occurred in Twilight versus what should be occurring to promote social justice. In other words, I wanted to examine the qualitatively different ways students experienced Twilight which broke the cycle of inequality that manifested in alternative school populations: marginalized groups in terms of class, gender, race, and disability. Through the lens of critical theory in the data analysis, an examination of how Twilight functioned either to thwart students' motivations and aspirations or to encourage them to achieve their goals, thus, determining whether Twilight was beneficial to the students by helping to improve their self-efficacy and breaking the cycle of inequality.

Barriers to Achievement for At Risk Students

Archambault, DeBruler, & Friedhof (2014) states that the at-risk student is a student who is likely to fail at school, typically seen as dropping out before high school graduation. Kaufman (1992) states that at-risk students are students who failed to achieve basic skills at a proficient level in mathematics or reading. Chen & Kaufman (1997) and Bulger & Watson (2006) identified students at-risk if they had one or more of the following characteristics: low socio-economic status, from a single-parent family, an older-sibling dropped out of school, the students themselves changed school two or more times, had average grades of "C" or lower from sixth to eighth grade, or repeated a grade. Various factors contribute to the educational outcomes of at-risk students, including quality of

teachers, access to high quality curriculum, school quality, socioeconomic status and support systems (Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015).

Vega, Moore, & Miranda (2015) stated that maintaining a stable and high-quality teaching force is important for academic improvement for at-risk populations. However, researchers such as Brown (2007) have noted high stakes testing **is** requiring teachers to spend more time on teaching to the assessments than attending to the needs of their students. Becerra (2012) observed that students with English as their second language felt that language was a barrier because many teachers wanted them to assimilate academically into the American culture immediately. Even if at-risk students wanted to assimilate, they often do not have the confidence to ask for assistance or the resiliency to continue when they received a rejection. Brown (2007) illustrated in his study how at-risk students had lower levels of self-efficacy than their peers and would not ask for help when needed.

Self-Efficacy for At-Risk Students

Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy contributes to the degree of success in the tasks that individuals attempt. People who regard themselves as highly successful attribute their failures to insufficient effort, those who regard themselves as unsuccessful attribute their failures to low ability (Bandura, 1994). In terms of student academic accomplishments, this indicated that students' lack of success could be related to negative self-efficacy beliefs. Additionally, at-risk students are likely to develop negative self-efficacy beliefs due to a statistical probability that they are unsuccessful in school (Gold, 2010). Research linking academic self-efficacy with school motivation and performance has reported reliably

strong results (Jonson-Reid, Davis, Saunders, Williams, & Williams, 2005; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001; Bong, 1999; Zimmerman, 2000). Students with higher academic self-efficacy, regardless of earlier achievement or ability, work harder and persist longer (Jonson-Reid et. al., 2005 & Pajares, 2002); have better learning strategies (Tseng & Walsh, 2016 & Zimmerman, 2000); and are less likely to participate in risky behaviors that negatively affect school success (Gold, 2010).

In students considered at-risk, their sense of personal self-efficacy is diminished (Gold, 2010). Applied to academic self-efficacy, this suggests that earlier negative academic performance is likely to lessen students' belief in their ability to achieve academically (Jonson-Reid et. al., 2005). Bandura (1994) states that "self-efficacy beliefs provide the foundation for human motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishment" (p. 178). Therefore, developing the self-efficacy of at-risk students could enhance their achievement rates (Gold, 2010). Gold's (2010) quantitative study used social cognitive theory as the theoretical framework on the impact of self-efficacy on the at-risk student's academic achievement. The purpose of his study was to examine the relationship between self-efficacy and academic achievement of at-risk students. His results indicated that students have lower levels of self-efficacy when they had to ask for help, regulate learning, or manage their leisure time (Gold, 2010).

Students having lower self-efficacy to manage their own leisure time could possibly be persuaded to engage in deviant behaviors or behaviors that will lessen their potential for academic success. This led to the students considering or being assigned to an alternative education program.

History of Alternative Programs

Modern alternative schools are rooted in the civil rights movement, but they have existed since the beginning of American education (Knopf, 2013). As social unrest grew across the country throughout the 1950s and early 1960s the United States public education was criticized for only meeting the needs of the few (Morrissette, 2011). President Johnson named public education as the front line of attack and created the War on Poverty and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. This initiated government backed and funded alternative education programs (Knopf, 2013). By the late 1960s and 1970s, alternative education gained momentum as a progressive education movement. Conley (2002) stated that alternative schools of the late 1960s and 1970s offered humanistic approaches, problem-solving skills, and the growth of self-efficacy. In 1983 the U.S. Department of Education's report *A Nation at Risk* was released, and it perpetuated a perception that America had failed to meet the educational needs of the students and they were dropping out of school and this perception incited the growth of alternative schools/programs. Public schools then shifted focus to actively seeking ways to keep at-risk students from dropping out of school (Holland, 2002).

Today public alternative programs are often denounced as “dumping grounds” for students with behavioral problems, academic problems, or both (Knopf, 2013). This perception is far from the truth. Alternative education programs include a wide variety that include but are not limited to, magnet schools, charter schools, home schools, virtual schools, language immersion schools, hospital schools, correctional facility schools (Gable, Bullock, & Evans, 2006). Alternative education programs are as diverse as the students who may need them and cannot be neatly defined (Knopf, 2013).

As alternative programs continue to grow throughout the country, the policies that govern them are also changing (Porowski, O’Conner, & Luo 2014). However, the same philosophy continues to permeate as it has throughout alternative education history “one size does not fit all” (Raywid, 1994).

Types of Alternative Programs

Raywid (1994) categorized the alternative programs into three types:

Type I: Schools of choice, sometimes resembling magnet schools, based on themes with an emphasis on innovative programs or strategies to attract students.

Type II: “Last chance” schools where students are placed as a last step before expulsion. Emphasis is typically on behavior modifications or remediation.

Type III: Schools designed with a remedial focus on academic issues, social-emotional issues, or both. These schools ascribe to more of a non-punitive, therapeutic approach (Raywid, 1994, p. 26-31).

Even with the description above about alternative programs, it is unclear whether this captures the complexity of today’s alternative programs (Gable, Bullock, & Evans, 2006). Raywid (1994) stated that academic success for students stemming from changing their school environment is often temporary, if it occurs at all. Of Type I, Type II, and Type III programs, only alternative programs that are built around the concept of change and community can create a successful alternative learning experience (Herrington, 2012).

Fitzsimons, Hughes, Baker, Criste, Huffty, Link, & Roberts, (2006) stated there are six core characteristics that distinguish alternative programs from traditional educational programs. These are (a) comprehensive student evaluation; (b) educational program that is aligned with student real-world expectations and reflects various nontraditional options;

(c) programming that promotes social, emotional, and behavior change within a safe, positive, and non-punitive environment; (d) continuous staff training and development; (e) policies and practices that support student transition from a more to less restrictive environment; and (f) continuous program evaluation and data based decision making (Fitzsimons et. al., 2006). Raywid (1983) stated that alternative programs should comprise instructional settings created to foster a positive learning climate featuring small class sizes, individual assignments, self-paced timelines, standards-based assessments, and informal student-teacher interactions.

Culture and Climate Characteristics of Alternative Programs

Johnston, Cooch, & Pollard's (2004) study of Bear Lodge in Northwest Wisconsin, showed that a caring community promotes the development of students to gain skills that will transfer their capacity for resiliency and self-efficacy beyond their walls and into their lives. The staff at the Bear Lodge developed a sense of community that created a successful program. Johnston, Cooch, and Pollard (2004) noted the characteristics for successful alternative programs are a clear mission statement, smaller enrollment than traditional programs, lower student/teacher ratio, more informal student/teacher relationships, a committed school staff, clearly stated rules, high standards, emphasis on individual accountability, integrated curriculum, student voice, and a student allowed to work at their own pace. The study noted that with these characteristics, Bear Lodge, had higher student attendance, standards-based curriculum, and a self-paced learning environment. The students stated that their close and informal relationships built with the staff contributed to their positive learning environment and sense of resiliency (Johnston, Cooch, & Pollard, 2004).

Student-teacher relationships were described by students in a study (Kallio & Sanders, 1999) conducted at an alternative program in Ohio. Participants indicated that they determined that smaller class sizes and individualized instruction had a greater impact on their school culture. Kelchner, Evans, Brendell, Allen, Miller, & Cooper-Haber (2017) determined that their study had no effect on student attendance. Kelchner et. al., (2017) examined the potential impact of a school-based intervention program for at-risk youths. The students had a mentor and attended group counseling sessions including incentive-based rewards for attending school and being on time. Despite the interventions the students still had a high rate of absenteeism. However, the study did notice that the students who received the positive interventions had less behavior issues and higher grades. The students noted that they felt that they still had an opportunity to succeed despite their academic or behavior adversities and they wanted to persevere through school (Kelchner et. al., 2017).

Resiliency in Alternative Programs

Zolkoski, Bullock, & Gable (2016) define resilience as attaining positive results in the face of adverse or threatening conditions, successfully handling traumatic experiences, and evading negative courses associated with risks. Therefore, children who can flourish despite adverse conditions such as poverty, racism, cohesion, mental illness, or substance abuse are described as resilient (Knopf, 2013). Despite their previous circumstances numerous students grow up to have stable lives (Henderson, 2012). Alternative programs are in a unique position to help students develop resiliency (Lee, 2012). Lee (2012) demonstrated that the invitational theory and other resilience theories are useful in the development of at-risk children. They concluded that resiliency and invitational theories

should be considered as part of a school culture change (Lee, 2012). Krovetz (1999) and Bethea & Robinson (2007) states that the best alternative programs are small enough that students have a sense of belonging and usefulness which is crucial to becoming a resilient person. Bethea & Robinson (2007) completed a qualitative research study that identified resilience in youths in an alternative education program in New York City. They concluded that smaller alternative programs provide at-risk youths the support they need to flourish while decreasing their chances of staying disconnected (Bethea & Robinson, 2007).

Henderson (2012) researched the Boomerang experience which is a program that serves an alternative to suspensions and focused on promoting resiliency. Boomerang promoted resiliency through social connectedness and student-teacher relationships while also strengthening the child-parent relationship through communication. Henderson (2012) used a mixed method and reviewed the program utilizing a transformative lens as the theoretical framework. The research concluded with an increase in resiliency and a decrease in suspensions based off the youth participating in the program. A recurring theme in most resiliency studies are the teacher-student relationships.

Zolkoski, Bullock, & Gable (2016) states that students in alternative education require: caring teachers, positive and supportive learning environment, and a small student-teacher ratio for a higher percentage of resilient and successful students. Their research investigated resiliency among students who have graduated from alternative education settings. They utilized semi-structured interviews and the Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993) in a present interpretive and descriptive qualitative study. Their research indicated that positive student-teacher relationships help with building resiliency.

Teacher Impact in Alternative Programs

Besides providing emotional and academic support, teachers play an essential role of modeling the desired resilient behaviors for their students (Waxman, Padron, & Gray, 2004). All students desire to learn even if they portray themselves to be unmotivated or unengaged; they may think they lack the skills to achieve in school; however, students who have teachers with positive mentality as well as belief in their students' ability and desire to learn have an intense effect on student resilience and self-efficacy (Goldstein & Brooks, 2007; Zimmerman, 2000). Cordell (2011) conducted a qualitative narrative phenomenological study on the relationship building between teachers and students in an alternative high school program. A heuristics inquiry as the theoretical framework for the research. All the senior students were asked to voluntarily complete surveys, but no student interviews. The teacher participants completed surveys, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group. The study concluded that building teacher-student relationships is an on-going process. Teachers building relationships with students help the students to feel a connectedness toward the school and a desire to engage in more school opportunities (Cordell, 2011).

Cook (2003) conducted a qualitative ethnographic study comparing the alternative schools to the public schools in Michigan. His research indicated that alternative programs allow for a closer, more positive relationship between teachers and students. His results specified that both teachers and students appreciated the better relationships which helped to lessen the behavioral problems. Grant (2011) conducted a quantitative study to examine the perceptions of African American male students at an Alabama alternative school. The research was rooted in the postpositivist paradigm. He surveyed one hundred

African American male student volunteers from three different alternative schools in Alabama using a two-part questionnaire/survey for data collecting. His results noted a positive relationship between the students and teachers resulted in a more positive perception of the schools for the students and parents (Grant, 2011).

Student Perceptions in Alternative Programs

Herrington (2012) stated that, for alternative programs to achieve their goals, it is crucial that students perceive themselves as important in their alternative settings. Research has shown that different school stakeholders have varying perspectives and that adding student perspectives to that of the adults may be critical to creating a positive learning environment (Souza, 1999).

Rovai & Jordan (2004) study indicated that all student comments regarding blended courses were positive. However, their study focused on working adults completing graduate level course work though in an alternative manner. The students reported enjoying the ease of pace and still having a sense of connectedness with the class (Rovai & Jordan, 2004). Herrington (2012) completed a phenomenological case study utilizing institutional pathology as the theoretical framework. This study interviewed 10 student participants, 10 parents, 10 teachers and one school administrator. Her study concluded that teachers with adequate professional development is necessary, but it is also important for caring teachers to be working in the alternative school setting. Students recognized that their alternative program teachers may not have the best training but if the teachers demonstrated the capacity to care for the students, then the students are willing to work hard for the teachers (Herrington, 2012).

Edgar-Smith and Palmer (2015) conducted a quantitative study comparing student perceptions of an alternative educational program for at-risk secondary students to their * public school environment. The students' perceptions of the alternative education program were more positive than their perceptions of the public school. Their study had 75 student participants who had to complete a questionnaire than the CES-R (Trickett & Moss, 1973) as a survey instrument. The research noted that several factors could have contributed to the more positive perceptions including smaller class size, one-on-one teacher-student interactions, engaging curriculum, and positive teacher-student relationships (Edgar-Smith & Palmer, 2015).

Conclusion

Alternative programs serve an important purpose within our communities. They are an intervention for students before dropping out of high school. They provide an opportunity for the development of **resiliency** and self-efficacy within a structured environment with assistance from positive teacher relationships. Student perceptions and experiences of an alternative high school program called Twilight **is** important because of *
*the low rate of student attendance and students leaving high school without graduating in Bibb County. This area **was** important because a phenomenographic study that investigated student perceptions and experiences of an alternative program such as Twilight **was lacking** in the literature. Most of the literature focused on phenomenological or case studies of alternative education. There was a lack of literature that focused on student perceptions of themselves and others in an alternative education program. Much of the alternative program research on programs like Twilight focused on the structure and academic achievement of the students (D'Angelo and Zemanick, 2009). This approach was

valuable but **had** lacked theoretical underpinning that served to benefit the teachers and **learners**.

The theoretical assumptions for the study are based upon fundamental socio-cultural teachings such as those of Vygotsky (1978) and Bandura (1993), who proposed that learning takes place first on a social level or that learning takes place during socialization and Karl Marx who postulated that dialogue should serve as a tool for change (Giroux, 2001) In addition, Vygotsky (1978) argued that interaction with other students contributes to achievement outcomes and cognitive development, and Bandura's (2011) social cognitive reiterates the importance of communication and socialization to learning. However, Horkheimer (1993) states that dialogue must lead to action that allows for a change in circumstances. As such the student's experiences in Twilight **have led** a positive impact on the students' perceptions of themselves and their futures.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenographic study was to explore student perceptions of themselves and their futures in an alternative program, called Twilight. More specifically, this study examined the **live** experiences of two **current** Twilight students, two Twilight graduates, and four Twilight teachers. Furthermore, this qualitative study explored the impact that teachers have on the students' self-efficacy and **resiliency** while in the alternative education program. This chapter included a detailed overview of the research design, value of methodology, setting, sample population, access to site, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and an overview of the data analysis **that was used to produce the findings.**

Worldview

The researcher's worldview had a major impact on a research study and how it was accomplished. A researcher's worldview is "the basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba, 1990, p.17). The relationship between knowledge that one knows and what could be known are grounded in the epistemological assumptions of one's beliefs. The ontological assumptions inform the epistemological assumptions which inform the methodology and it impacts the methods chosen for data collection (Jorrín-Abellán, 2016).

In qualitative research the four most discussed worldviews are: (a) post-positivism; (b) constructivism; (c) pragmatism; and (d) transformative. Post-positivism is more closely associated with quantitative research (Creswell, 2014). Empirical observation,

measurement, and theory verifications are necessary for an understanding of the world. Post positivist assumptions are considered traditional research and the scientific method is their accepted approach to research. The scientific method begins with a hypothesis, collect data, make necessary revisions or conduct more tests (Creswell, 2014). While constructivism is typically aligned with qualitative research. Social constructivists research relies on as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2014). Constructivism believes that there is not an objective truth, but truth is socially constructed (Jorrín-Abellán, 2016).

Researchers utilize all approaches available to understand the problem as they emphasize the research problem instead of focusing on the methods (Creswell, 2014). Mixed methods researchers utilize a pragmatism worldview because it allows for multiple methods, different worldviews, and different assumptions (Creswell, 2014). Finally, a transformative worldview focuses on the study of lives and experiences of diverse groups that have traditionally been marginalized. Transformative research provides a voice to the participants to help improve their lives or agenda. The research links political and social action to the inequities it uncovers, becoming a united voice for reform and change (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative researchers use a transformative worldview that is grounded in critical theories (Creswell, 2014).

This study was conducted from a transformative worldview. Transformative researchers focus on the needs of individuals that may be marginalized (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, researchers utilize a collaborative approach between themselves and the research objects (Creswell, 2014). Influencing social change by utilizing the research to stress the need is a crucial aspect of the worldview. Transformative worldview was

evident in **why the problem I studied was selected** and influenced the design decisions made throughout the methodology.

The purpose of this research was to reach a deep understanding of the different ways in which students experienced the Twilight program. Hence, this study explored the **live** experiences and perceptions of two **current** Twilight graduates, two Twilight students, and four Twilight teachers as they reflected on their time within the Twilight program. This study was conducted at the educational setting of the participants through notes, interviews, and a focus group. Specifically, thorough and open-ended questions were asked during the interviews and focus groups that provided the stage for discussions and interactions, where participants reflected and described their experiences that drove their perceptions about the phenomena (Creswell, 2014). As a result, emerging a collective conception of the phenomena (Akerlind, 2005 & Creswell, 2014).

Researcher's Positionality and Goals

The researcher's positionality relative to the study was of a former teacher within the Twilight program for five years **at the school being studied**. The researcher was working in a different position at another school **outside of the Bibb district during the research process**. Additionally, the researcher was not working in the district during the research process.

As a former employee of the **Bibb** district, **it provided** the researcher ***** insight into the Twilight program initiative. Subsequently, as a former employee of the program it fueled the researcher's passion for the Twilight program, while it infused curiosity of Twilight's impact on **student's** perceptions of themselves and their future. Additionally, having worked at the program **provided** the researcher **with** ***** established relationships

with the staff. However, for the purpose of unbiased research, the researcher developed selection criteria so that only participants without prior relationships were selected.

In summary, this qualitative study did not utilize the researcher's relationships with the participants and their ideological beliefs surrounding the Twilight program to shape the methodological approach employed by this study. The next step in this research design was * the definition of the goals that guided the study.

Goals were the motives, desires, and purpose for completing the study. Goals serve two central roles for the research: as a guide of the design decisions and justification of the study (Maxwell, 2008). Personal, practical, and intellectual were the three kinds of goals for doing a study. Goals that motivate the researcher to complete the study were personal goals. Goals focused on accomplishing something were considered practical. While intellectual goals are focused on understanding something (Maxwell, 2008).

Intellectually, the researcher is adding to the field of education by providing at-risk students the opportunity to give feedback about an alternative education program, such as Twilight. It provided students the opportunity to give feedback about Twilight; supported the current analysis that students wanted and needed high expectations, accountability, structure, individual attention, and caring adults within schools. Additionally, the researcher identified the different ways in which students experienced Twilight. Finally, the researcher offered the insight of the teachers' perspective on Twilight and its impact on the students.

At the time of the study, the school district being studied was in the middle of phasing out the Twilight program. Thus, personally, this study served as a tool to assess the impact of the Twilight program on the community, beyond the scope of graduation

rates. Furthermore, the findings of this study aided the researcher as a leader to better understand the impact of alternative education programs in the community.

Practically, the researcher provided recommendations based on the life experiences of students participating in the program. More specifically, the researcher sought to create a richer understanding of the impact and role alternative education programs had within local school systems, beyond graduation rates.

Background and Problem Statement

High school dropouts are a difficult problem facing our society (Bäckman, 2017). As demands for a more educated workforce continued to climb, the economic and social ramifications for those who failed to complete high school increased. Students not completing high school was a significant problem within education. Despite the numerous interventions and programs that the county provided to assist students to graduate high school, students were still leaving high school in high numbers. This problem had negatively impacted the community and school attendance, because students were leaving school without graduating. Possible causes of this problem were school culture/climate, lack of resiliency, self-efficacy, and student-teacher relationships. Perhaps a study which investigated student perceptions and experiences of an alternative high school model called Twilight, identified several factors that contributed to success for these students and contributed information/or influenced other educational programs in the district.

Research Question

To explore what it is like for high school students to participate in an alternative education program, like Twilight, and how that experience influenced the student's

perceptions of themselves and their vision of the future, the following research questions guided the study.

Central Question: How will the students' experiences within the Twilight Program influence their perceptions of themselves and their future?

What are the qualitatively different ways in which students' experience the Twilight program?

Research Tradition – Qualitative Inquiry

To answer some research questions, we cannot skim across the surface. We must dig deep to get a complete understanding of the phenomenon we are studying. In qualitative research, we do indeed dig deep: We collect numerous forms of data and examine them from various angles to construct a rich and meaningful picture of a complex, multifaceted situation. (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 147)

In the field of education, there are many complex questions that cannot simply be answered through quantitative approaches. They require more in-depth understanding of what is going on behind any quantitative numbers. Although there are several different qualitative approaches, they share two common features (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). All qualitative approaches seek to understand phenomena within natural settings and a goal of understanding the complexities and factors that contribute to the phenomena (2001). Qualitative inquiry is illustrated by several characteristics: (a) exploration of a problem within a natural setting, (b) collection of data from various participant perspectives to provide a holistic description of the phenomena, (c) collection of multiple sources of data, (d) researcher as a key instrument (e) application of inductive and deductive analysis, (f)

emergent design and (h) reflexivity (Creswell, 2014, pp. 185-186; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 147).

Qualitative research allows for the gathering of data rich in detail due to its wide range of data collection sources (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). The methodology due to thorough and detailed research allows for a closer understanding of the subject's perception and/or perspective (Lincoln, 1998). Qualitative research emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, using inductive reasoning, and highlights understanding the participant's perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research was chosen to get the personal experiences of students and graduates enrolled in an alternative program, Twilight.

Research Tradition

Phenomenography is a qualitative approach for describing various ways people experience and interpret a phenomenon (Marton, 1981). Phenomenographers seek to categorize the many conceptions that individuals have for a phenomenon (Ornek, 2008). While phenomenology is used when the research problem requires an understanding of human experiences common to a group of people. The role of the phenomenological researcher is to describe what the research participants have in common as they experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, phenomenological research examines the core of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013), while phenomenographic research focuses on how people experience a given phenomenon (Marton, 1981). Phenomena is defined as the state people find themselves engaged in through daily living, relative to the world around them (Vagle, 2016).

The phenomena that was researched for this study was an understanding of the different ways in which students' experience the Twilight program. Phenomenography was selected as the most appropriate research tradition given the researcher's desire to study various ways that students experienced the phenomena. Phenomenography works better for educational settings than phenomenology because it investigates the experiences of others. In summary, this phenomenographic research was used to illustrate the different ways in which students experienced the Twilight program (Hathaway & Fletcher, 2018; Creswell, 2013).

Within the multiple research traditions in qualitative research, we believe phenomenography would work better than others like case study, ethnography and grounded study because it focuses on the essence of the experiences and the subsequent perceptions of the phenomenon (Hathaway & Fletcher, 2018). While a case study focuses on developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases it requires data collection over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2013). Case studies are used when a case is bounded by time or place that will inform a problem (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007). An ethnographic study describes and interprets a cultural and social group in a natural setting over a prolonged period. Typically, in ethnography the researcher studies the shared patterns of behaviors, language, and actions of the group (Creswell, 2013). Whereas a grounded theory is developing a theory grounded in data from the field (Creswell, 2013). A grounded theory relies primarily on interviews and is used when no theory exists or existing theories are inadequate (Creswell et al., 2007). The other qualitative designs while effective did not answer the research questions concerning student perceptions and the Twilight program. The focus of this phenomenographic study

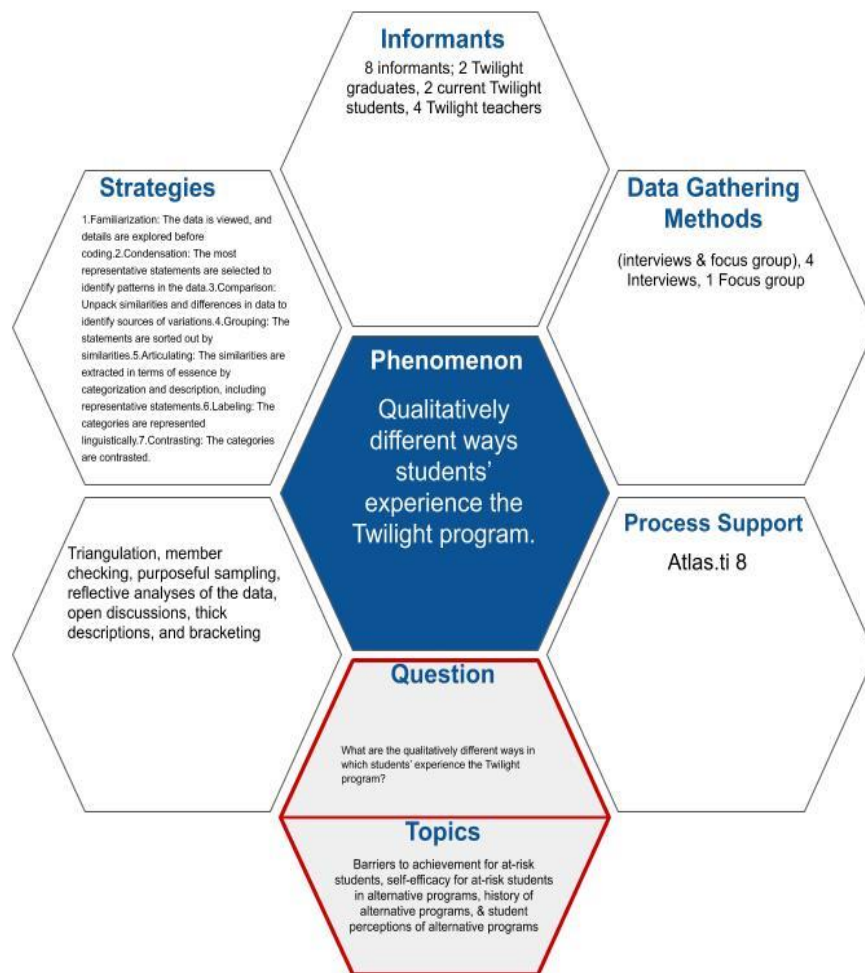
was the illustration of the differences in the participants' experiences and understanding of their time in Twilight and its impact on the participants' perceptions of themselves and their future (Hathaway & Fletcher, 2018; Creswell, 2013).

Phenomenographic research studies how individuals experience the phenomenon in question (Hathaway & Fletcher, 2018; Orneck, 2008; Richard, 1999; & Marton, 1981). Phenomenography is a second-order perspective because the phenomenon is explained by the participants while in a first-order perspective the phenomenon is analyzed by the researcher's perspective (Richardson, 1999). Results in a phenomenographic study are presented as categories of description (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013; Orneck, 2008; Hathaway & Fletcher, 2018). These description categories emerge as a result of the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon (Hathaway & Fletcher, 2018). Experiencing a phenomenon suggests a connection between the participant and the phenomenon (Marton & Booth, 1997).

Further, Collier-Reed & Ingerman (2013) state that the categories of description create the outcome space, which links the relationship between categories and characteristics of the phenomenon. Within this study, the students' perceptions of themselves and their future is the focus as a qualitative change happens as the participants transition through perceptions through direct interaction with the phenomenon (Hathaway & Fletcher; Richardson, 1999). In conclusion, a phenomenographic research design was used to investigate the qualitatively different ways in which students' experience an alternative education program, like Twilight. Also, the study examined the impact that the student-teacher relationship had on the student's self-efficacy and resiliency. Figure 2 is a graphic depiction of the research design for the study.

Figure 2.

Visual representation of the key elements of the study.



Note. Generated using the Hopscotch Model (Jorrín-Abellán, 2016, 2019).

Research Setting

The setting of this study was an alternative high school program located in the Middle Georgia area. There were nine Twilight teachers, seven females and two males, and their number of years working in the Twilight program range from 1 – 5 years. Teachers

were required to have same the credentials as other teachers within the local school district following the standards of the state. The alternative program was housed within a local high school within the county and had 139 students enrolled. The demographics of the school are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographics of the Twilight Program (2017-2018 Academic Year)

Characteristic	% of Students
Free and Reduced Lunch	100
English Learners	5
Students with Disabilities	80
Race/Ethnicity	
African American	95
Asian	0
Hispanic	0
Other	2
White	3

Note: E. Stevens (personal communication, May 2019)

At the time of the study, the Twilight program was in the last year of the program. More specifically, the program had provided the students with transportation, childcare, evening snacks, meals, counseling, mentorship, and career planning. This program created an opportunity for at-risk students to gain a high school diploma who were in danger of not completing high school.

Selection of Participants

This study employed a purposeful sampling process which selected participants that met the selection criteria (Harsh, 2011). Purposeful sampling required the researcher to select participants who can inform the understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative studies have clear criteria for sampling and rationales justifying the decisions include sampling criteria which are needed for a valid study (Creswell, 2007). Criterion sampling ensured that all participants included in the study met specific criteria. All students currently enrolled in the Twilight program as well as those who had graduated from the program within the past year were included in the initial pool of possible participants. The following selection criteria were used to identify student participants who were invited to participate in this study.

1. Students that were enrolled in the Twilight Program or students graduated from the Twilight program within the 2018-2019 academic year.
2. Students between 18-22 years of age
3. Students with no prior experience with the researcher
4. At least one participant from each gender was selected to address possible conceptual differences from both groups (current students, graduated students)

The pool of participants that were selected for this study came from the population of students who graduated from the Twilight program within the past year and students who were in the Twilight program. Graduates of the Twilight program were added to the sampling to provide perspectives from various sources of involvement of the Twilight program.

The age-related criteria for the selection of participants in this study were limited to students or graduates between 18-22 years old. Additionally, this study sought to identify one male and one female from current students, and one male and one female from those who graduated from Twilight within the past year. Participants from each gender were selected to address possible conceptual differences between the two genders. (Sin, 2010).

The participants were limited to individuals who graduated from the Twilight program between January 2019 and December 2019 as well as those enrolled in the Twilight program as of August 2019. This timeframe for participation limited the impact of distorted memories based on too much time passing. Sin (2010) states that a variety of participants is necessary to ensure varied conceptions were gathered to yield a healthy set of category descriptions. Additionally, the researcher worked as a teacher in the Twilight program for five years. To limit bias, a selection criterion of no prior relationship with the researcher was included.

The criteria for the selection of teacher participants were teachers who had worked in the Twilight program for at least one year. This study included at least one male and one female teacher who worked in the Twilight program. Teachers with prior relationships to the researcher were excluded.

Access to Research Setting

This study was conducted at a high school where the researcher was previously employed. The program was in an urban city in the Middle Georgia area and served approximately 130 students in grades 9th-12th. This study was conducted with Twilight students, graduates, and teachers on the impact the program had on students' perceptions of themselves and their futures. The researcher as a former staff received permission and

access to the site from the building principal. The building principal also directed the Twilight coordinator and staff. After permission for the site was granted, the researcher completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application and application to complete research within the district. District research applications were granted once a month by a committee and were subject to Board of Education and the superintendent's approval within the district. The researcher received approval from the district committee prior to acquiring participant volunteers. Participants volunteers were selected based on the selection criterion. To gain a higher level of personal accounts, participants with a prior relationship with the researcher were excluded. The interviews were conducted on site in a quiet designated room within the media center.

Data Collection Procedures

Just as the conceptual framework guides the selection of the most appropriate methodology for this study, it also guides the decisions made regarding the methodological choices and particularly the data collection procedures (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017).

This qualitative study will utilize two data collection strategies including student interviews, and teacher focus groups. This study hopes to gain critical details regarding the impact of the Twilight program on student perceptions of themselves and their futures by tapping into their individual experiences.

Student Interviews

Sin (2010) states that phenomenographic studies commonly audio recorded semi structured interviews as a data collection strategy. The purpose of the interviews were to explore the live experiences of the participants and their conceptual understandings of the phenomenon of Twilight (Rands & Gansemer-Topf, 2016). It was critical that the

participants convey their connection with the same phenomenon, which in this study was the Twilight program (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013). Creswell (2013) states that data collection should limit participants to those who have experienced the phenomenon being studied. Sin (2010) and Anderberg (2000) agree that an intentional-expressive approach to the interview is appropriate for phenomenographic research. An intentional expressive approach is one where interviewees are asked questions about the phenomenon first then are asked additional questions until the conceptual meanings are clarified and confirmed systemically (Anderberg, 2000; Sin, 2010). To encourage the interviewees to reflect on the conceptual meaning of terms or phrases used to describe their experiences, follow-up questions were asked (Sin, 2010). Using this approach allowed the phenomenon to be explored jointly between the interviewer and interviewee in phenomenographic interviews (Marton, 1994; Sin, 2010).

Ornek (2008) described another important function of the semi-structured interview with follow-up questions which enabled the interviewer to study the reflection of the participants as they answered the follow-up questions. It was also important to conduct the interviews as comfortable flexible conversations that flowed based on the responses provided. Hatch (2002), Wertz (2005), and Finlay & Gough (2003) agree that the participants should guide the interview process and that the researcher must control the structure or flow to help them realize their feelings and thoughts. The interview allowed how the natural flow impacted the depth of responses regarding the Twilight program and how the program impacted them and their future.

To increase the trustworthiness of the data captured through the interview process, the researcher audio recorded each interview with the permission of the interviewee. The

use of the audio recording allowed the researcher to ensure both the accuracy of what was said and notes ensured the context and body language clues were captured. Sin (2010) and Kvale (1996) cautioned that transcribing oral language to written form may change meanings because meanings are contextual, and the context of the interview is lost. Phenomenographic analysis that relies solely on transcripts may misinterpret information because aspects of the experience cannot or are not verbally expressed (Sin 2010 & Barnacle, 2005).

To mitigate the limitation of transcription, written notes were made during the interview of relevant contextual features, and the researcher created reflection notes on the interviews afterward (Sin, 2010). To address this limitation, the researcher used notes to capture the contextual features during the interview. However, the use of the audio recording ensured that the process of capturing the contextual notes did not impede the flow of the interview since the researcher verified the notes taken against the audio recording. The interview protocol included open-ended questions that focused (Hatch, 2002; Wertz, 2005; Finlay & Gough, 2003; & Creswell, 2013) on the perceptions of themselves and their future while in the Twilight program. As part of the interview protocol, students signed a consent form to participate in the study since participants must be between 18-22 years of age. Participants were reminded that the interview was voluntary, and that they could stop the interview or participation in the study at any time (see appendix B).

Researcher Notes and Journaling

Sin (2010) and Kvale (1996) stated that transcribing oral language to written form may change meanings because meanings are contextual, and the context of the interview is

lost. Phenomenographic analysis that depended solely on transcripts may misinterpret information because aspects of the experience cannot or were not verbally expressed (Sin 2010 & Barnacle, 2005). To mitigate the limitation of transcription, written notes made during the interview of relevant contextual features, and the researcher should create reflection notes on the interviews afterward (Sin, 2010).

Teacher Focus Groups

Focus groups have varying definitions but include common elements: small group of 4-8 people, a researcher/facilitator, discuss selected topic, non-threatening environment, encouraging group interactions, and exploring participants' perceptions, attitudes, feelings, or ideas (Wilson, 1997). Group participation was a key component of the focus group as group participation assisted with bringing out participant's perceptions on a topic. Focus groups are usually used in conjunction with another qualitative or quantitative method for additional creditability (Wilson, 1997). For this study the focus group consisted of four teachers and lasted approximately 30 minutes. Participation in the focus group was voluntary. Verbal consent was obtained from each participant, and the focus group was conducted at the research site. The focus group was digitally recorded on a password protected laptop. The interviews and focus group notes were transcribed by the researcher and rev.com. The transcribed interviews, notes, and focus group were uploaded into ATLAS.ti cloud, as primary documents (Rands & Gansemer-Topf, 2016).

Phenomenographic research data can also be collected through focus groups, open-ended survey questions, notes, or written reflective statements (Rands & Gansemer-Topf, 2016). Written statements include, as much or little information and detail, as the subject chooses. This increases the objective nature of the data as individual accounts (Alsop &

Tompsett, 2006). However, the data that was gathered in this study consisted of semi-structured interviews, notes, and a focus group (Lindberg, 2008; Sin, 2010; Creswell, 2013; Rands & Gansemer-Topf, 2016). The interview and focus group processes consisted of questions that are open-ended and focused (Hatch, 2002; Wertz, 2005; Finlay & Gough, 2003; & Creswell, 2013) on their perceptions of themselves and their future while in an alternative education program. The goal of the interviews, focus groups, and notes for the researcher were to find about the conceptual understanding of the phenomenon from the participants (Sin, 2010; Rands & Gansemer-Topf, 2016).

Data Analysis

The description of conceptions is used to identify the variety in how the phenomenon is experienced in phenomenographic research (Sin, 2010; Ornek, 2008; Ashworth & Lucas, 1998). Akerlind (2005) however state that there are similar philosophies of practice that include: (a) setting aside all preconceived notions to avoid bias; (b) focusing and preserving the collective experience by analyzing the transcriptions as a group to create emerging categories; and (c) examining various meanings of the conceptions and their structural connections. Categories of description are the experiences generalized and categorized and arranged in a logically inclusive structure giving a picture of collective experience of the phenomenon within the group under the outcome space (Rands & Gansemer-Topf, 2016; Marton, 1994).

For this study, the data analysis utilized the seven steps proposed by Dahlgren and Fallsberg (1991) that are specific to this type of study: 1. Familiarization: The data is viewed, and details are explored before coding; 2. Condensation: The most representative statements are selected to identify patterns in the data; 3. Comparison: Unpack similarities

and differences in data to identify sources of variations; 4.Grouping: The statements are sorted out by similarities.; 5.Articulating: The similarities are extracted in terms of essence by categorization and description, including representative statements; 6.Labeling: The categories are represented linguistically; and 7.Contrasting: The categories are contrasted. Akerlind (2005) states that the data analysis starts with an exploration of shared and differing meaning across the notes, interviews, and focus group. Using, Larsson & Holmstrom (2007) the researcher focused on the following while examining the various transcripts: (a) structural elements of the categories; (b) the *how* or *what* characteristics of the phenomenon; (c) patterns of similarities and differences within the categories; and (d) comprehending the inconsistencies between the participants. The researcher then analyzed the data in which the participants gave precise details about their reflection on their experience of the phenomenon (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013).

Member checking was performed to ensure alignment between the participant's events and transcriptions, after the interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed. Next, the notes, focus group, and interview transcriptions were uploaded into ATLAS.ti cloud (Rands & Gansemer-Topf, 2016) as primary records and arranged into categorized descriptions. ATLAS.ti cloud served as the basis for writing the textural and structural accounts of the participant's experiences (Stake, 2010). An explanation of the collection of the conceptions of the students' perceptions of themselves and their future in an alternative education program, like Twilight.

To account for the researcher's past knowledge and experience with Twilight, bracketing was conducted. Ashworth & Lucas (1998) state that bracketing is the process of setting aside one's prior assumptions or preconceived notions, about the nature of the

phenomenon being studied. Bracketing is done to reveal the personal reality of the participant (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998). The researcher enacted bracketing in this study by the following means: (a) utilizing an outside source to uncover assumptions and biases that may influence the research (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998); and (b) writing memos throughout the data collection process to sustain focus on the data (Schutt, 2006).

Trustworthiness of the Study

Guba (1981) developed four criteria for determining the trustworthiness of qualitative research: (a) credibility; (b) confirmability; (c) dependability, and (d) transferability. The four criteria were introduced as counterparts of quantitative research rigor for judging the trustworthiness of research findings (Sin, 2010).

Guba (1981) refers to credibility as having confidence in the research findings. The researcher established credibility by (a) spend adequate time in the field to understand the culture and phenomena of interest; (b) triangulate data using interviews, focus groups, and notes; (c) member checks (d) use a varied participants that bring a diversity of data and enhance the overall collective conception of the phenomenon; (e) create thick description of the phenomenon through descriptions of the context and the participants (Creswell, 2013).

Creswell (2013) refers to confirmability as the level of value and neutrality in the findings. Anney (2014) states that the concept of confirmability is determined by the findings and not the bias of the researcher. Confirmability in this research was established by: (a) member checking; (b) providing in-depth and detailing the methodology; (c) providing visible evidence from process and product.

Dependability is the ability to demonstrate consistent results that can be duplicated (Guba, 1981; Anney, 2014). The researcher demonstrated dependability by: (a) providing in-depth and detailed methodology and data analysis procedures; (b) and using member checking which allows participants to evaluate the interpretation made by the researcher and suggest changes if the participants felt they had been misreported (Creswell, 2013; Anney, 2014).

Transferability is the means to demonstrate the results are applicable in other environments (Guba, 1981; Creswell, 2013; Anney, 2014). The researcher created transferability by providing a thick description of the data to allow the findings to be transferred from the environment. Member checking was performed to ensure alignment between the participant's events and transcriptions, after the interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed.

Limitations and Delimitations

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenographic study was to examine the different ways in which students' experience the Twilight program. The major limitations of this study were limited time and participants. Though limited participants were expected in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenographic studies usually consisted of 20 or more participants (Rands & Gansemer-Topf, 2016; Alsop & Tompsett, 2006). Therefore, the study was delimited to two students, two graduates, and four teachers in one alternative program in a city in Georgia at a fixed period (Creswell, 2013). The school setting was limited to a single alternative education program in Georgia. Time constraints were also considered a limitation. This study gathered data over a week's time. A longer term of study may yield different results.

Ethical Considerations

During the research all ethical statutes were fulfilled and upheld in relating to conducting human subjects research. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant for the interviews and focus groups. All information collected was used only for the study. The researcher did not engage in any type of inappropriate behavior. Unless the researcher was required by law to report an unsafe act or crime, no information gathered as part of this study was shared with others (Creswell, 2013). The researcher did not intrude upon the privacy or lives of the participants. Research was conducted in an appropriate, timely manner that was agreed by all parties. Explicit permission was needed from participants for the disclosure of any personal information.

The researcher earned the trust and confidence of the participants by informing them of the nature of the study and reminding them that they can terminate participation at any time, without ramifications. Participation in the study did not cause harm of any kind and data was kept on a password protected computer.

Summary

This chapter described the research methodology that was used in this qualitative phenomenographic study. The purpose was to interview students, graduates, and teachers at an alternative education program, like Twilight. Data collection identified qualitatively different ways in which students experience Twilight.

Chapter Four

Findings

This phenomenographic study sought to examine student experiences while in an alternative education program, Twilight, and explore how those experiences impacted their perceptions of themselves and their vision of their future. Opportunities for high school drop-outs in this country are extremely limited and the costs to the individuals as well as our society are high. Georgia took steps to address the drop-out problem by implementing initiatives around graduation coaches and increasing early learning programs. While these initiatives hold some promise, the implementation of alternative schools such as Twilight appear to hold potential to support students to earn their high school diplomas and to positively impact their perceptions of themselves along the way.

In this phenomographic study, the researcher employed researcher memos/reflections, one-on-one interviews, and a focus group to investigate the perceptions of students who are participating in an alternative education program, Twilight. The question driving this research study was:

What are the qualitatively different ways in which students' experience the Twilight program?

The process of qualitative data analysis is both an art and a science. There are several important strategies that researchers should follow when analyzing qualitative data such as (1) using tables and graphs to illustrate the data; (2) providing answers to all research questions; (3) using direct quotes to support findings; and (4) explaining the significance of the findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). One way to bring this qualitative phenomenographic study to life was for the researcher to gather data from the participants

within the natural setting of the Twilight program. Then the researcher analyzed the multiple forms of data collected and interpreted the findings to generate a belief of how the informants experienced the phenomenon of the Twilight program. (Creswell, 2013; Larsson & Holmström, 2007). The following steps were taken when analyzing data from this phenomenographic research: (1) reading data sources numerous times to become accustomed with the contents; (2) gathering and summarizing similarities and differences from the data sources while highlighting quotations; (3) coding the quotations into code families to extract the important components of the study; (4) consolidating the code families, to identify emerging categories of descriptions; (5) naming of categories of descriptions; and (6) synthesizing the categories of description into an outcome space. (Kahn, 2014).

The purpose of this study was to answer the research question and contribute to the field of education by offering educators and districts a deeper understanding of how students experience alternative education programs, like Twilight. Furthermore, this study provided an understanding of the study participants experienced the Twilight program in qualitatively different ways.

Study Participants

The participants in this study were four teachers, 2 current and 2 former students from the Twilight program in Middle Georgia. The teachers were chosen because they all met the participant criteria including current enrollment in Twilight or having graduated from the Twilight program within the 2018-2019 academic year, between the ages of 18-22, and no previous experience with the researcher. Due to the participant's involvement

with the Twilight program, each informant was able to provide rich descriptions of their perceptions of the experienced phenomenon.

To ensure confidentiality, the researcher assigned a pseudonym to each participant. The teachers were given the pseudonyms April, Ann, Ashley, and Adam. Additionally, the students were given pseudonyms Greg, Gavin, Gwen, and Gabby. Participant profiles in Table 3 were constructed by asking the participants questions about their role.

Table 3

Participant Profiles

Participant Pseudonym	Role	Point in Program
April	Teacher	Employed
Ann	Teacher	Employed
Ashley	Teacher	Employed
Adam	Teacher	Employed
Greg	Student	Currently Enrolled
Gavin	Student	Graduated from Twilight
Gwen	Student	Currently Enrolled
Gabby	Student	Graduated from Twilight

The following is a short narrative of the participants detailing their work experience, school experience, and a brief description of how the students came into Twilight and the teacher's current positions. This information was gathered during the focus group and interview process.

Participant Portrayals

April is a woman from Georgia who grew up in an urban setting. She is in her early sixties and is a retired high school ELA teacher after thirty-one years of teaching. With over thirty years in the profession, she is surprised by the amount of challenges and barriers that her students deal with daily in the Twilight program. She worked at Twilight for over five years.

Ann is a female from the Mississippi Delta area who moved to Georgia a year ago. She is in her late forties and has worked at the high school level for over ten years. She has worked in a similar program in another state and was impressed by all the services that Twilight offers the students. She worked at Twilight for over two years.

Ashley is a woman from the northeastern United States who moved to Georgia several years ago. She is in her late fifties and has over fifteen years of experience in education. She is currently the graduation coach at local high school, and she worked at Twilight for a year.

Adam is a male born and raised in the Middle Georgia area. He is in his mid-fifties and has worked every level within K-12 schools. He has been in education for over fifteen years and has worked as a paraprofessional, special education teacher, ISS teacher, and behaviorist. Currently he is a counselor for the alternative school, and he worked at Twilight for over six years.

Greg is a young male who was enrolled at Twilight. He had been in the program for five years on and off. He voluntarily enrolled in Twilight after accumulating multiple incidents of tardiness and absences for his classes. He stated that with his high number of absences he had failed already so he decided to take a chance with Twilight.

Gavin is a young man who graduated from Twilight. He stated that it took him six years to graduate but he took two years off to deal with personal issues. He enrolled in Twilight because he did not fit in with traditional school and felt Twilight would provide him more personal freedom.

Gwen is a young female who was enrolled at Twilight. She had been in the program for three and a half years. She enrolled in Twilight because of attendance and health concerns. She stated that she needed the flexibility that Twilight allowed her.

Gabby is a young woman who graduated from Twilight. She stated that it took her two years to graduate. She enrolled in Twilight because it was a recommendation from her high school principal due to her excessive verbal and physical altercations in school.

Results and Analysis

This study used three types of primary data sources: (1) researcher memos; (2) interviews; and (3) a focus group. The aim of incorporating these data sources was to examine the conceptual understanding of the phenomenon from each of the participants (Sin, 2010; Vagle, 2016). After the interviews and focus group were transcribed and the transcripts and researcher memos were uploaded into ATLAS.ti the researcher analyzed the data using open coding, axial coding and selective coding processes. The ATLAS.ti process correlates to the qualitative data analysis process as outlined in Table 4.

Table 4.

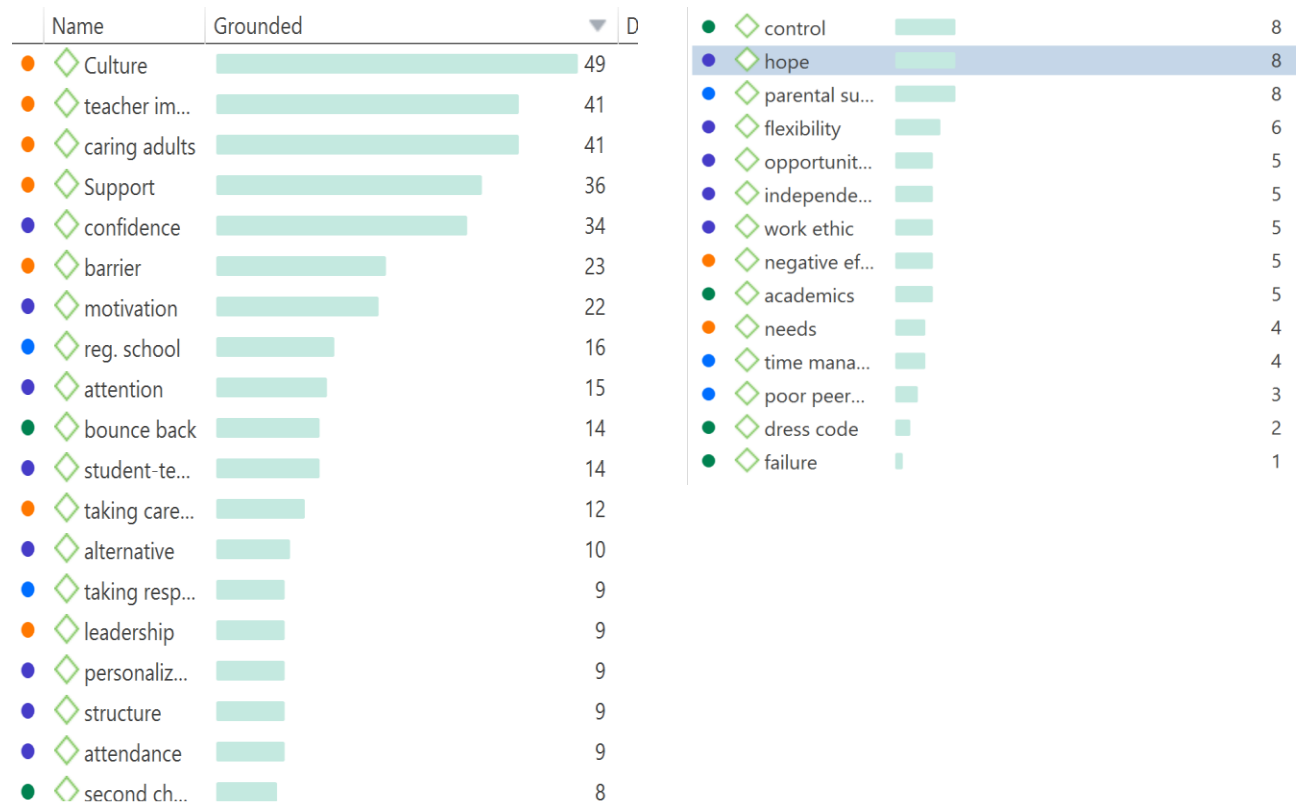
Correlation Between Data Analysis Process and ATLAS.ti Coding Process

Phenomographic Data Analysis Process	ATLAS.ti Coding Process
Reading and Re-Reading Data Sources	Open Coding
Gathering and summarizing similarities and differences	Axial Coding

Coding quotations and code families	Axial Coding
Consolidating code families into categories of description	Selective Coding
Synthesizing categories of description into outcome spaces.	Selective Coding

The researcher began the data analysis process by reading and re-reading the data sources multiple times to acquire a strong familiarity with all of the responses. Part of this process included the generation and expansion of the researcher's personal memos for each interview and the focus group.

During the open coding phase thirty-three codes were initially identified by the researcher. Initial codes were identified based on the researcher's opinion of the frequency of appearance within and across different participants, the importance of the statement, and the potential connection to the research question. The initial coding process was iterative as additional codes emerged; the researcher considered the appropriateness of the new codes with the previously coded statements to ensure accuracy of the coding process. An iterative process is a repetition of a process to generate a sequence of outcomes (Creswell, 2013). Through this iterative process, as each new code was identified the code was evaluated against the existing codes. In doing so, the researcher combined or collapsed the codes into the final thirty-three individual codes as identified in Figure 3.

Figure 3.*Initial 33 Codes*

Following the initial coding process, the researcher further identified the associated quotations from the interviews that contained these codes as part of the familiarization and condensation process of (Dahlgren & Fallsberg, 1991).

Also, as part of the open coding phase, the researcher used bracketing to approach the phenomenon being explored for the first time (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, the researcher employed the use of adding memos throughout the data analysis process, which allowed the researcher to document any insights that emerged (Cutcliffe, 2003). The researcher used the bracketing technique as she reviewed and re-reviewed the interviews

and the focus group transcript by noting thoughts, feelings, and perceptions as evidenced by Figure 4.

Figure 4.

Researcher Bracketing Example

Greg (02:59):
Really getting up, going to school was a problem. I don't like getting up in the morning, you know, I will, I'll uh, I work at night and getting up in the morning that, that was an issue for me. So by the time I got to school, half the day was over so I was missing credits, you know, it was almost time to graduate, but two years away, maybe, maybe a year away, I really don't remember. And I was still a freshman. I needed to do something different. I also, I didn't like all the crowds. It was just too many people. My house is pretty quiet at home for the most part. The only person making a lot of noise. Maybe my mom's, but she doesn't make too much. And when she does, she doesn't know because she's deaf. So you know, it's pretty quiet.

Interviewer (04:04):
How would you describe, I'm sorry I didn't mean to cut you off.

Greg (04:09):
No, no, it's okay.

Interviewer (04:11):
Thank you. How would you describe the Twilight program to others who might be interested in attending?

Greg (04:20):
Mm. It's kind of a no excuse. They take everything away, you know, everything that could be a problem. You know, you got a kid, cool. The guy teach you, you hungry? Cool. They feed you. You ain't got no way. They're cool. They pick you up, you know, you're not good at school. Cool. There's teachers everywhere. They take all the excuses away, you know, it's really ready for people ready to graduate. You know, it's, it's, you know, you got to put all that aside. And can you explain a little further when you mean put off, what aside, you got to put aside all the other stuff from, you know, you know the other, the other schools, you know, the teachers and everybody saying you can't do it. All the other students, just all of the other problems. You just put all that aside because when you, when you in Twilight, they ain't, they ain't nothing that you in the world, you ain't got no choice but to do it. So you know it real talk, you know, it's, it's, it's legit. Real talk.

Interviewer (05:47):
Okay. Thank you. What would you say are some of the best things about the Twilight program? And can you give me some examples?

Greg (05:59):
Okay. Okay. The teachers, by far the teachers are the best thing about the program. I mean, they go above and beyond to show us how much they care. I mean, I mean, Ms. Stevens, she would call every day and be like, D, where are you? D I'm here and no cap. That felt good. I knew somebody cared no matter what Ms. Stevens care. And, um, I love that woman to the day. I die. I love that woman. They call me whether it's just check up on me or say I love you. You know, I like that feeling and it gives me, uh, a sense of family and I feel like I've been missing that. I like that. Also the control. Um, when I say control and I'm talking as if I'm the one that's in control and control of me getting to class control of making sure my work gets done, you know, they put it in my hands, so to speak.

Commented [CC2]: Uninterested speaking about previous school. waved hand in dismissive manner

Commented [CC3R2]: Possibly not dismissive but more uninterested because the experience wasn't as positive as he would like.

Commented [CC4]: He hesitated to admit this information.

Commented [CC5R4]: Great background info & helps to give context as to why he enjoyed the quiet of program. Most students complained.

Commented [CC6]: Makes it seem like a fact.

Commented [CC7]: Heated... seen to be repeating a speech he heard many times.

Commented [CC8R7]: Very adult response almost like he was pumping himself up to finish... like reviewing in his head everything Twilight does to help him & others

Commented [CC9]: Strong emotion coming through his voice. He is smiling huge → love for his teacher

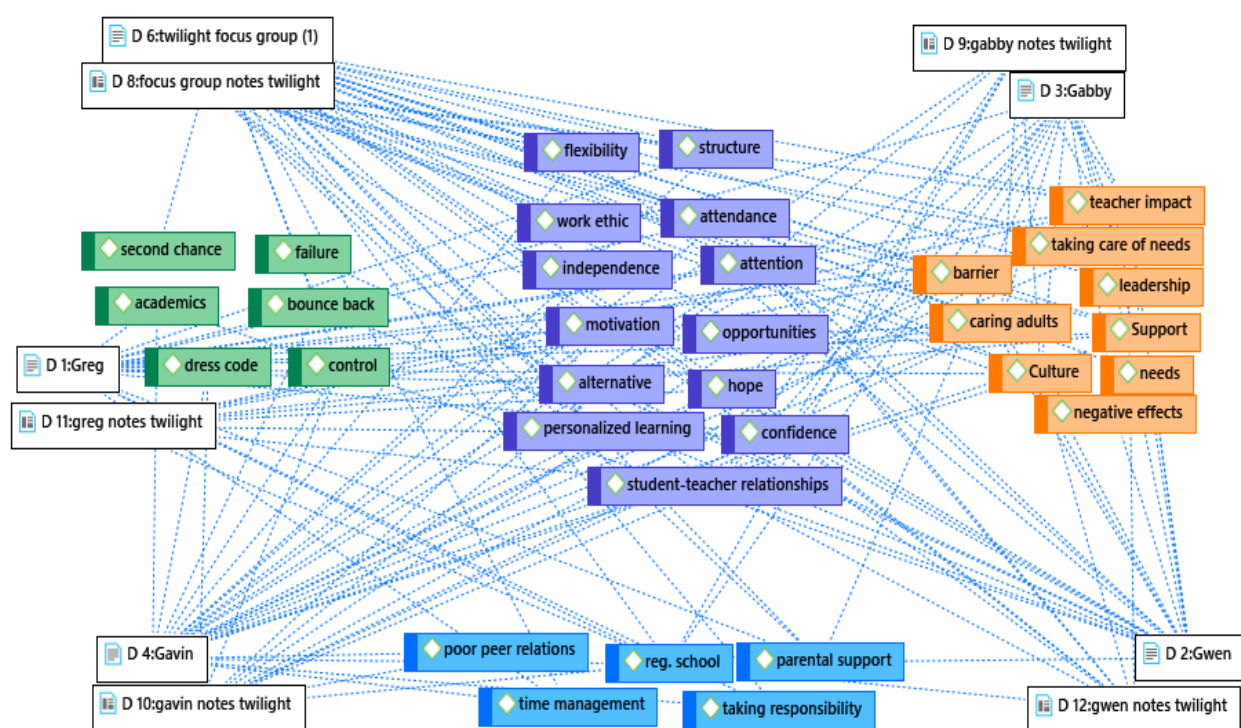
Commented [CC10R9]: The control is definitely an after thought to have something else to say. He was mainly speaking about teacher

This allowed for the re-examination of the researcher's position at various stages of the research process. To increase the trustworthiness of the data collected, the researcher asked the study participants to read the transcriptions to ensure their experience was correctly interpreted (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013).

The researcher then moved into the axial coding phase to gather and summarize data based on similarities and differences and began consolidating the initial 33 codes into groups. Figure 5. reflects the connections between the initial 33 individual codes and the participants.

Figure 5.

Relationships between codes and participants



During comparison of the individual codes, the development of logical relationships emerged throughout the data establishing initial code groupings through an iterative process. During this phase, the researcher grouped these codes based on similarities, repetitions, and eliminations resulting in the following four code groups:

1. Aspects for Success
2. Structure of the Program
3. Teaching Strategies,

4. Impact of the Program

Figure 6.

Individual Codes with Initial Code Groups

Group 1:	Group 2:	Group 3:	Group 4:
Aspects for Success	Structure of the Program	Teaching Strategies	Impact of the Program
Alternative	Academics	Personalized learning	Attention
Attendance	Alternative	Student-teacher relationships	Confidence
Attention	Attendance		Hope
Barrier	Bounce back		Independence
Caring adults	Confidence		Motivation
Culture	Control		Opportunities
Flexibility	Dress code		Parental support
Independence	Failure		Poor peer relations
Leadership	Flexibility		Regular school
Needs	Hope		Structure
Negative effects	Independence		Student-teacher relationships
Opportunities	Motivation		Taking responsibility
Personalized learning	Second chance		Time management
Student-teacher relationships	Structure		Work ethic
Support	Student-teacher relationships		
Taking care of needs	Work ethic		
Teacher impact			

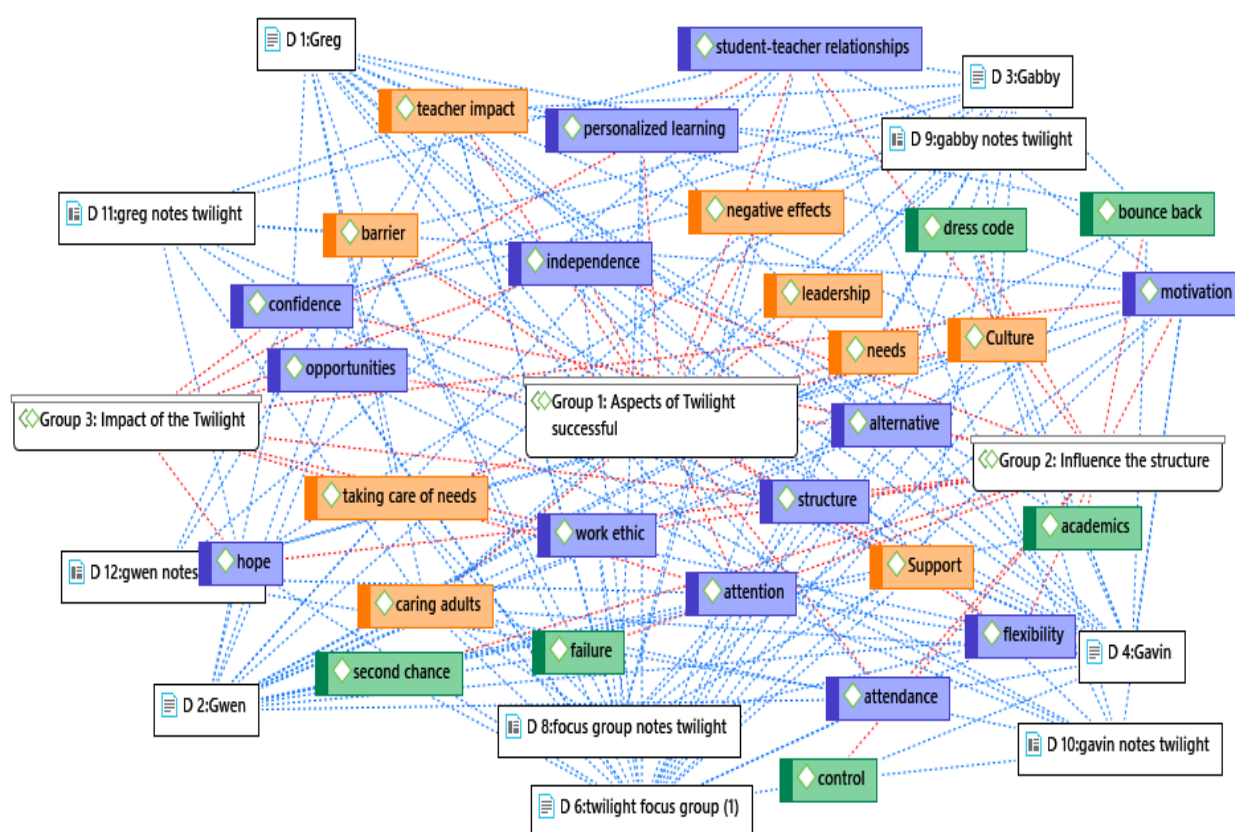
Based on this analysis view, the researcher recognized that the sparse alignment between teaching strategies code group and the data sources. Upon further reflection and re-analysis, the researcher collapsed the teaching strategies group into the structure of the program and aspects of Twilight that make students' feel successful group resulting in the three initial code groups: 1) Aspects for Success, 2) Structure of the Program, 3) Impact of the Program

This analysis process also allowed the researcher to analyze the codes across participant groups to verify the variations and agreements. Codes with negligible utterances in association with data sources were combined if no significance, or variances relative to experiences were identified. The codes listed above will formulate the code groups that will lead to the topics of interest. Figure 7 below suggests a strong

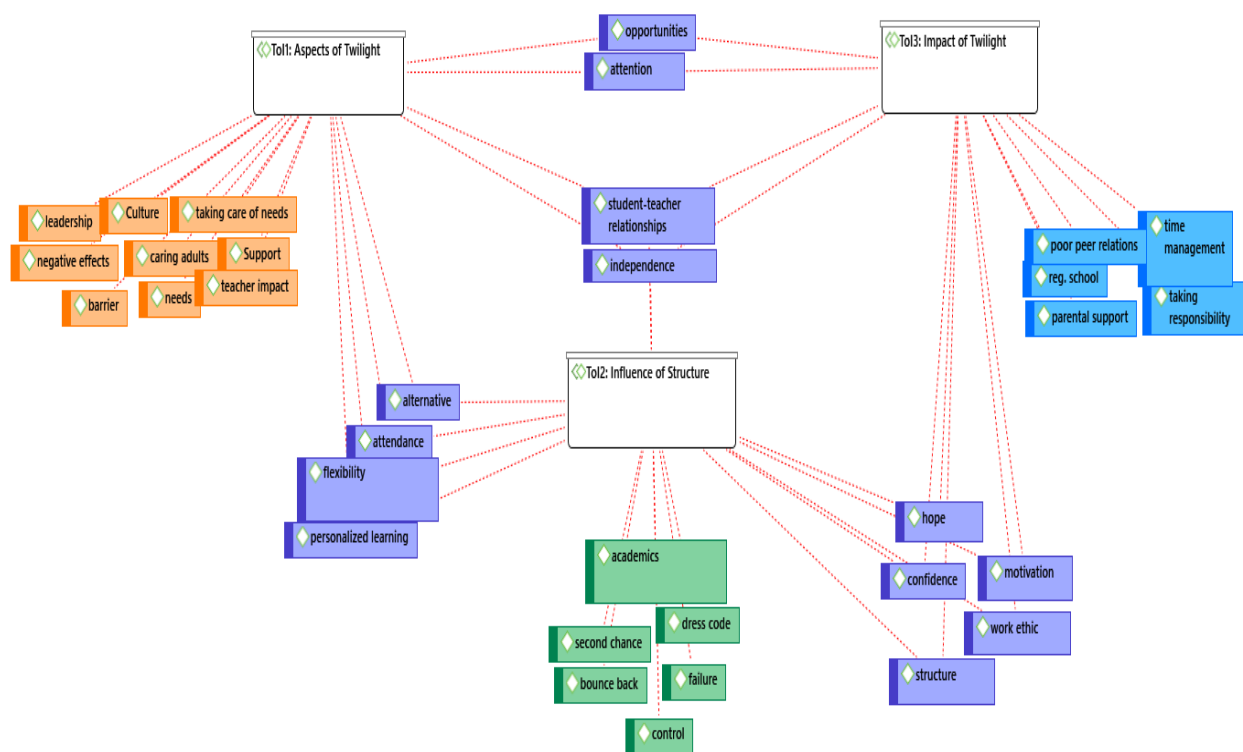
triangulation between the data sources (interviews, focus group, and researcher memos) relating to the codes as evidenced by the density of the network.

Figure 7.

Group codes across data sources



The next phase of analysis was to consider how the three code groups would relate to topics of interest. This offered a way to organize the narrative descriptions to more deeply examine the findings and how they relate. Figure 8 illustrates how the initial thirty-three codes relate to the topics of interest.

Figure 8.*Alignment of Topics of Interest and Initial Codes*

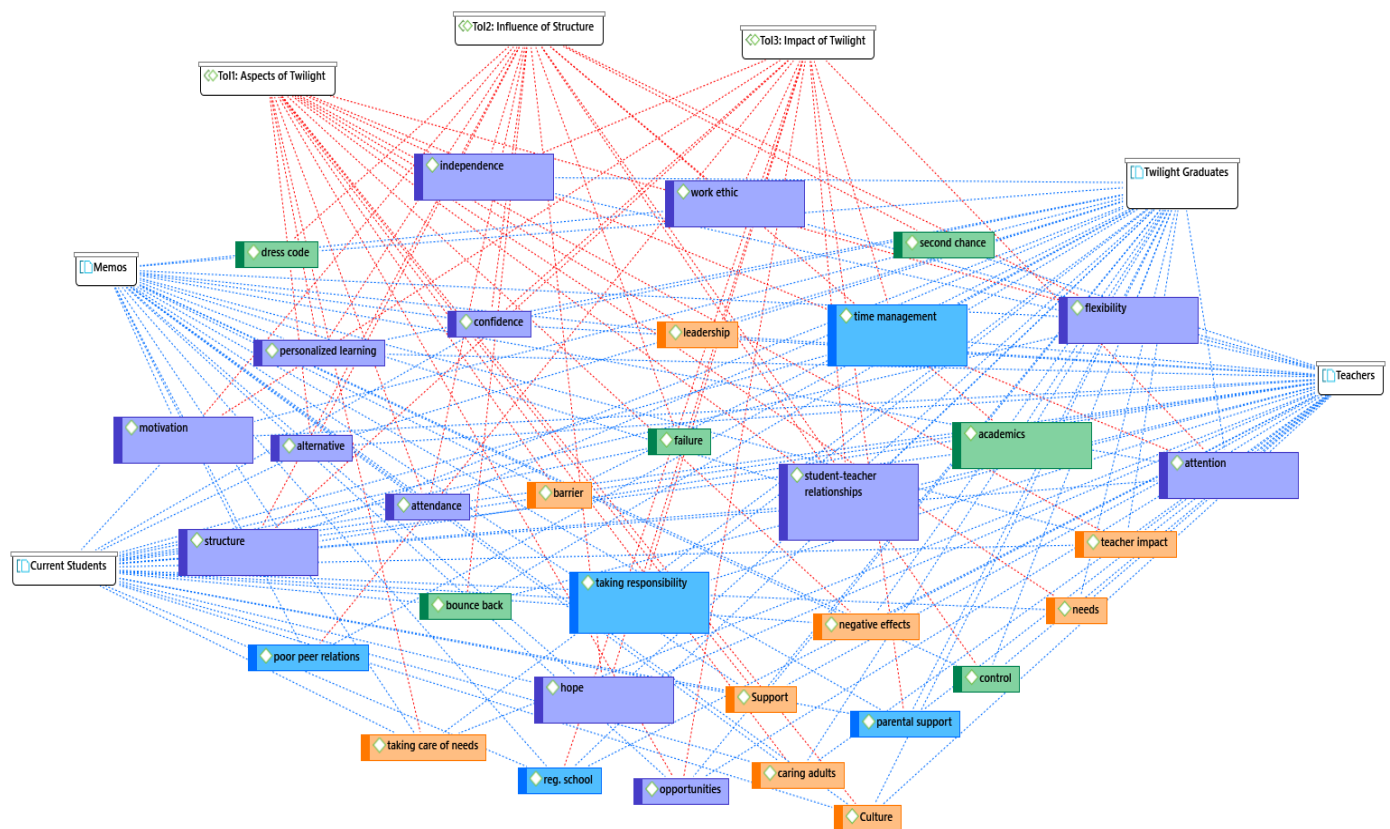
The iterative process develops code groups by grouping together data considered to be representative of the same meaning (Dahlgren and Fallsberg, 1991). The three topics of interest identified during the axial coding period were: *aspects of Twilight that make students feel successful, influence the structure of Twilight has to support students' learning, and the impact of the Twilight program on participants' perspectives on themselves and their future*. Figure 8 reflects how the researcher organized the initial codes into the three topics of interest.

The selective coding process allowed the categories of description to emerge through key steps. The articulation step is the initial attempt to encapsulate the essence of what makes each topic of interest similar (Dahlgren and Fallsberg, 1991). Through a process of comparing and contrasting, a refined set of distinct categories representing the

qualitatively different ways students' experience Twilight. Developing the final categories based on the emergent meanings, key elements, and distinguishing features (Marton & Booth, 1997). Assigning each emergent category, the appropriate label takes multiple readings of the data before its given. The categories represent the aggregated descriptions of how the Twilight program was understood by the study participants as evidenced in Figure 9.

Figure 9.

Density Among Topics of Interest by Data Sources and Codes



This level of analysis also allowed the researcher to begin seeing how the participants may have experienced the Twilight program in similar and different ways.

Important phrases were compared against the interview transcripts as a means of ensuring the trustworthiness of the descriptive categories (Marton & Booth, 1997; Dahlgren & Fallsberg, 1991). The categories of description for the study were: *culture, self-efficacy, teacher impact* (see Table XK). The three categories of description display qualitatively different ways that students experience Twilight as it was seen to emerge from the interviews when the narratives of experiences were analyzed to find differences and similarities.

For this study, culture refers to the way the Twilight staff members work together and their set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that they share. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Banduara, 2000). Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment. While, the teacher impact refers to the student-teacher relationships that developed within Twilight.

Study findings are discussed around the three topics of interest by presenting data from interviews, memos, and a focus group. The findings will be discussed based on the three topics of interest that emerged during the axial coding: *aspects of Twilight that make students feel successful, influence the structure of Twilight has to support students' learning, and the impact of the Twilight program on participants' perspectives on themselves and their future.*

Topics of Interest

Aspects of Twilight that make students feel successful

The first topic reflects the aspects of Twilight that contribute to making the students feel successful. Data from the student interviews, teacher focus group and researcher

Figure 10.

Alternative.

The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that Twilight was different

from traditional school. They indicated that Twilight provided another pathway to completing high school within the community. When asked why he enrolled in Twilight Greg stated,

So by the time I got to school, half the day was over so I was missing credits, you know, it was almost time to graduate, but two years away, maybe, maybe a year away, I really don't remember. And I was still a freshman. I needed to do something different. I also, I didn't like all the crowds. It was just too many people.

Ann confirmed this when stated,

It was a student here and was not a behavior problem. Academics, everything was well but her attendance meaning her tardies were so bad And she was actually in my class in the traditional ed and I was like, you know, why are you even getting sent over to Twilight. And she said, I'm not a morning person. It's that I cannot get up. You know. So, Twilight like actually gave. cause I never even thought about something like that. So, it actually gave them another outlet.

Greg and Ann both describe situations needing an alternative to traditional school. Both students had personal barriers and transitioning to a program that allowed them to attend school in the evenings or virtually helped them to graduate. Gwen and Gabby further describe an atmosphere within the alternative structure of Twilight that allowed students to focus on their work. While Gwen felt, "It's so quiet and Twilight, there's no one to really talk to. Everybody is, they're focused on work, so that's no fun."

Gabby reiterated

It (Twilight) gives you focus. It's no distractions. You just going to go in there and you're gonna finish. You're gonna do your schoolwork and you're gonna go home. There's not a lot of people to be talking and hanging around with is not a lot of, um, drama. None of that is done. So it's just focus business.

As Gabby states, Twilight allowed students that were focused on the business of school to complete school with limited distractions.

Attention

The attention code appeared fifteen times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that the attention received from Twilight was different from the traditional school. The students appreciated the attention that was given to them by the Twilight staff. Gwen's mentions how the staff pays attention to the students and recognizes them for their accomplishments. Gwen,

Yes ma'am. Um, like when we pass a class, they're announced our name on the intercom. Uh, um, they give us, they put us in a raffle for gift cards when we, when we come to school, you know, good attendance on the school in school, on the program because we can work from home. They, um, they call our parents and let them know when we're doing really well or there's, or as they say we're on a roll.

While Gwen described more of the attention and recognition, they provided for academic success the remaining students described more personal attention that Twilight provided. Greg stated,

They showed me, they told me every day that I went out, especially I could do anything, you know, if I, when I walked in there and when I didn't walk in there, they called me in. They chewed me out telling me that I'm special and I could do anything and I wanted too. Why wouldn't I there do it. Man, I missed that. Yeah. That's what it did. That's what it did. That's what it did.

April stated,

I've always wanted to be someone who gave one on one individualized instruction. You can rarely do that as much as you might want to do it in a traditional setting. But in a non-traditional setting you have fewer students.

Caring Adults

The caring adults code appeared forty-one times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that

Twilight held more caring adults than the traditional school. All the participants noted that staff at Twilight was full of caring adults. They would often go above their assigned duties and responsibilities to assist the students with their concerns. As Greg stated,

Okay. Okay. The teachers, by far the teachers are the best thing about the program. I mean, they go above and beyond to show us how much they care. I mean, I mean, Ms. Stevens, she would call every day and be like, D, where are you? D I'm here and no cap (lie). That felt good. I knew somebody cared no matter what Ms. Stevens care. And, um, I love that woman to the day, I die. I love that woman.

Gwen explained,

I know that there's always going to be some teacher, somebody that's going to have some time to just sit with me. You know, they never just get mad at me when, when they feel that I'm not doing something, they just, just talk to me.

Gabby goes further,

Um, they always texted me sometimes, you know, if I'm lonely during the day, I'll just text Ms. C just to tell her I love her and just to see what she doing. And she'll text me back and you know, I like that, you know, they're not my friend, but there, there are people who care about me and I like that.

April further elaborated,

Um, the teachers, not that teachers in traditional school aren't caring, but these teachers were coming from their regular jobs to come here to do this extra work here. And so those teachers were motivated to make sure that these children succeeded, and the children understood that the children had my number, they could text and call me anytime.

When April mentioned how much the Twilight teachers care and are motivated to help the students, it was noted that the remaining teachers agreed through head nods and exclaiming “Amen.”

Flexibility

The flexibility code appeared six times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that

Twilight offered more flexibility than the traditional school. Twilight afforded the students the opportunity to work at home and/or school through the online courses. Many of the students expressed their pleasure at having the flexibility to complete their coursework.

Gwen states,

Uh, yes ma'am. I'm sorry. It's kinda like I said, you know, um, I can work from home. Like, you know, I'm sick so if I want to work, I can work. If I don't wanna work, I don't have to work. And that's really good.

As Gwen mentions, Twilight gives student's flexibility with attendance and class work.

Students have a variety of reasons for needing the flexibility, and the Twilight program gave it to them while continuing their high school education. Ann mentioned earlier that Twilight was a flexible attendance option for students who had trouble getting to school daily.

Independence

The independence code appeared five times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that Twilight allowed more independence from the students than in traditional school.

Twilight allowed the students to experience greater independence within school. Many of the student had more outside responsibilities than school, so they felt restrained by the rules and policies in traditional school. Twilight gave the students more independence through the structure and culture of the program. In Gavin's words, *"Twilight is a breath of fresh air. You have options and Twilight; you have freedom and you have control. And that's, that's the, that's the beauty of Twilight."*

Opportunity

The opportunity code appeared five times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that Twilight gave them another opportunity that was closed in traditional school. In Twilight, students had another opportunity to complete high school. The student's past was not a hindrance or a reminder for them in Twilight. They had a fresh start to create a different high school experience than what they traditionally had. The teachers felt strongly that having the opportunity to complete Twilight contributed to their feelings of success. Several memos noted how earnest and grateful the students' tone and demeanor were toward Twilight. The students often spoke of Twilight in excited tones and gestured with their hands indicating their enthusiasm for the program. April stated, *"Twilight. Um, has finally given some nontraditional children an opportunity to have a second chance to be successful, to um, find a way, a path in which they can see something in life."*

Personalized Learning

The personalized learning code appeared nine times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that Twilight offered more personalized learning than in traditional school. A personalized learning environment educates the whole child and takes into consideration the needs of the student, both in and out of school, and recognizes the impact that life circumstances may have on the student's education (Zmuda, Curtis, and Ullman, 2015). This concept was described by the students and teachers in several incidents when discussing Twilight. The

students repeatedly stated that their Twilight teachers would see to their needs before attempting to educate them. Gabby and Greg described incidents where the caring adults of Twilight provided them the attention that they needed to be successful. Gavin described, *“But you know the students that came in with kids, they see about them (their kids) first and then they would get into the schoolwork and, and it was more one-on-one.”* As Adam stated,

But anything that we can do to remove a barrier, we did. So whether it was making sure his child got here, tested, was taken home or whatever it may not be, and we'd done it and you, Ms. April done it, everybody in this table pretty much has done something extra to make sure that the barriers was eliminated.

Student-Teacher Relationships

The student-teacher relationships code appeared fourteen times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that Twilight benefited from stronger student-teacher relationships than in traditional school. The students reiterated often that the relationship with teachers were different in Twilight than in the traditional school. The students would remark that the Twilight teachers seemed to care about them as a person and they responded to that relationship. As the students described incidents that indicated the staff cared about them, they were not describing a caring in the sense of a dogged pursuit to their personal and academic success. These are students who felt that everyone at some point or another in their lifetime had basically given up on them in some manner. So, for the Twilight teachers to continue calling and responding to students even when they were not doing their best was meaningful and important to the students. The focus group memos noted how passionate all the teachers' tone was when discussing their students. Adam would lean on

the table and attempt to interrupt others to make points of emphasis about how critical it was to support and remove any obstacles that could impede their learning.

Taking Care of Needs

The taking care of needs code appeared twelve times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that Twilight would take care of their needs more so than the traditional school. Twilight attempted to take care of most needs a high school student may have that could interfere with their academic success. The program had services to address the students' needs but they also made sure to keep the focus on the student's success. When Greg was describing Twilight he stated,

Mm. It's kind of a no excuse. They take everything away, you know, everything that could be a problem. You know, you got a kid, cool. They have guys to teach your kid and you. You hungry? Cool. They feed you. You ain't got no way. They're cool. They pick you up, you know, you're not good at school. Cool. There are teachers everywhere. They take all the excuses away, you know, it's really ready for people ready to graduate. You know, it's, it's, you know, you got to put all that side.

For the students to experience Twilight, a program that refused to allow them to fail, that refused to allow them to give up, and attempted to take care of their needs this was a totally new occurrence for some students previously destined to fall between the academic cracks.

Influence the Structure of Twilight to Support Student Learning

The second topic of interest relates to the influence the structure of Twilight has to support students' learning. Figure 11 reflects the topic of interest as related among the

Figure 11.

[illegible]

The academics code appeared five times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that Twilight did not focus on their academics in the same manner as the traditional school. Twilight used a combination of computer-based instruction and face to face teaching for their academic classes. The curriculum does not change between participants' traditional education site

and Twilight. All the participants noted that if they had any troubles academically that the Twilight teachers were there for assistance. Gwen stated,

Mmm, they gave me a lot of help. They explain things over and over again and I need that, you know, I missed a lot of time. So there's a lot of stuff that I really don't know. And they, they'll go back and explain things. They don't mind going back, even though it might not be a part of the lesson.

The structure of the academic classes contributed to the success of the students because it was an alternative program allowing them (the students) to have flexibility, independence, and fostered the student-teacher relationships. Often the students' described teachers and staff as making sure that their personal needs were met before addressing their academic concerns. The students felt that being in an alternative flexible program that the academics would come because Twilight was attempting to address their needs and/or concerns.

Structure

The structure code appeared nine times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that Twilight was structured differently from traditional school. The rules and policies at Twilight was slightly different from those at the students' traditional schools. These included, not attending face-to-face classes until evening, smaller classes with less than 10 students, flexible attendance policies, and following norms and processes. The rules are put into place to provide structure and embed certain behaviors into students so that will be successful after leaving the program. When asked to describe Twilight many students focused not on the classes or rules, but how the staff wanted to make address their needs first. Gavin described,

So I can honestly say that I saw the structure of Twilight was different. Like when you walk in the door, it wasn't about bells and whistles and classes and all of that. They talked to you first, made sure if you were hungry you got food or water.

Gabby exclaimed,

But in Twilight, I don't have to worry about that because the teacher ain't worried about only tests. They weren't worried about dress code thing. They weren't worried about attendance; they just want to make sure that you mind is right first and if you are safe.

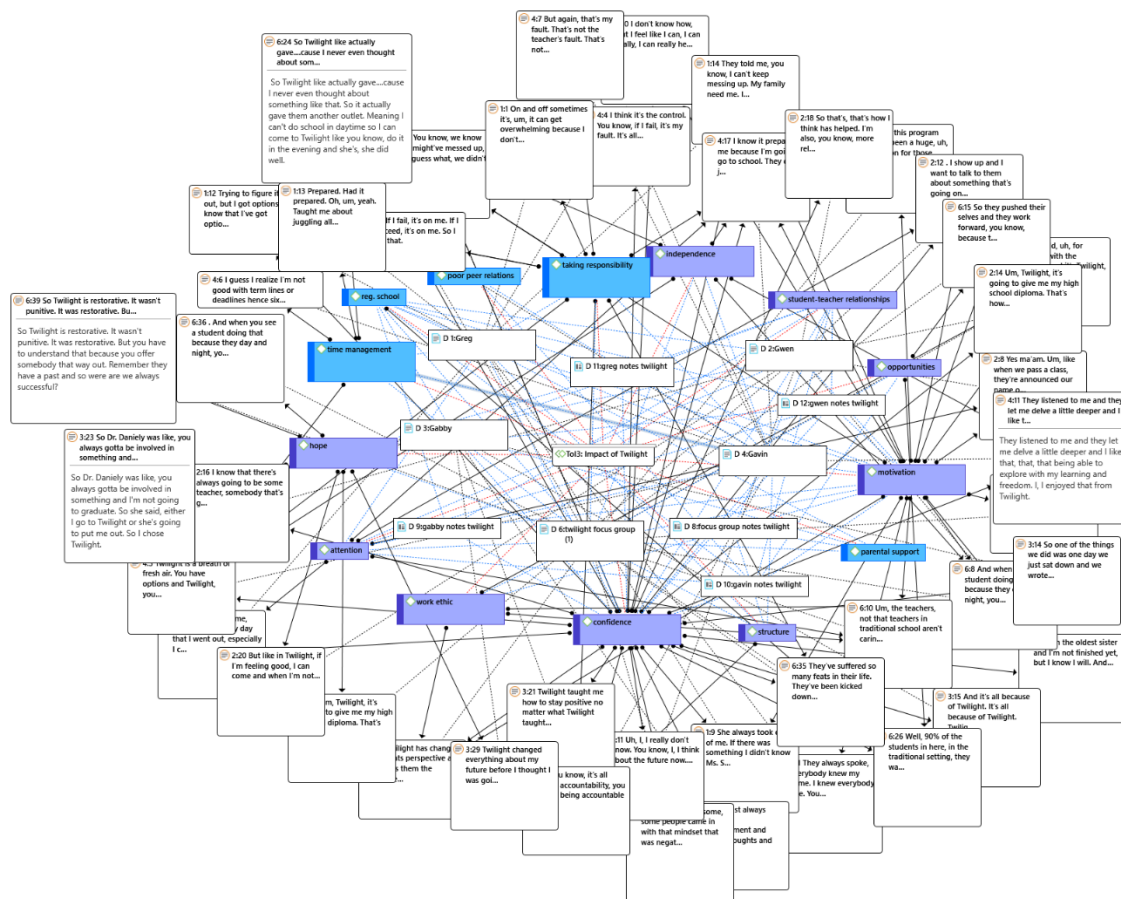
Gwen describes a quiet and focused environment and how it has helped her in school. Gwen felt, *"I'm also, you know, more relaxed in here (Twilight). I don't, I don't have as many stomach issues here as I did in regular school, so I think that's helped me too."* The teachers also expressed the importance of removing barriers or taking care of the students' needs so that they can focus on their learning. After the students' concerns were dealt with than teachers were able to focus on strategies and techniques to assist with students' learning. Ann stated,

And something else Twilight provided for us and the students. Um, a lot of students are hungry and even in traditional settings it's hard for them to concentrate and keep that energy going with their hunger and Twilight, like we were able to provide them with meals and snacks to keep them going like that throughout the class. So that's a major difference. One of the major differences as well from traditional and non-traditional setting. We can address their needs almost immediately so that they can return their focus to learning.

Impact of the Twilight Program on Participants' Perceptions of Themselves

The third topic relates to the impact of the Twilight program on participants' perceptions of themselves. The student participants were all eager to describe the impact that Twilight has had on them. Figure 12 reflects the topic of interest as related among the data source quotations, codes, and participants showing a strong alignment between the codes, topic of interest, and participant responses.

Impact of the Twilight program on participants' perceptions of themselves



The confidence code appeared thirty-four times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that Twilight gave them more confidence in their abilities than what they experienced in traditional school. All the student participants described how Twilight helped to boost their confidence in their abilities. Greg is unsure about his future but with complete confidence and pride he stated that he knew that he would be ok because of experiencing Twilight. Greg stated:

I don't know how, but I feel like I can, I can really, I can really help people with my sign language because that's something I naturally do. And there's not a lot of people that do that. Especially that look like me. I mean look at me and I can sign like I can really sign. So, I think I want to do something with that. And you know, I like music so maybe I could figure out a way to put that together. But the fact that I even, I'm even thinking like that now is something that I didn't do before Twilight.

Gabby discusses how the Twilight helps her remain confident and positive when she is feeling sad. Gabby states,

And just always giving me encouragement and positive thoughts and just, just, she's just always just telling me just great things. And I just love that and I appreciate that. And they just always telling me that, you know, I'm real smart and I can do it and I know that I'm smart, but sometimes I don't think I can really do it. So, I just like that.

Gwen discussed how the structure of Twilight helped her to relax and focus. However, it also helped instill confidence that she will complete high school. Gwen shared, *"I'm the oldest sister and I'm not finished yet, but I know I will. And Twilight has, Twilight is giving me, you know, giving me that they're helping me with, um, finish school, no matter how many setbacks."* Gavin's insight:

I know it prepared me because I'm going to go to school. They didn't judge me. They allowed me to develop my confidence and a voice and they never, they never rushed me. They allow me to do it in my own time. So, I believe I'm mentally stronger and more prepared for college or for or for whatever happens next. They show me how to kind of bounce back or, um, or you know, my Ninja way. You know, making sure I never give up. That's what they are always talking about never give up.

Gavin graduated but it took him longer than most students. Still he states that Twilight helped him to develop confidence because of through their patience and modeling of resiliency. Adam felt, *"Twilight has changed students' perspective and it gives them the perspective that I can finish that whatever happened in the past is now gone and I can make it to the finish line."* Modeling resiliency and providing a system of caring and supportive

adults allowed the students to develop their own confidence. A lack of self-confidence could lessen their motivation to complete classes or finish the program.

Hope

The hope code appeared eight times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that Twilight provided them hope. Along with confidence Twilight is given the students' hope about their future. Since some of them had negative school experiences they did not have much hope of finishing or moving on with post-secondary school options. Twilight is giving the students hope for their future through coming high school. When Gwen speaks of completing high school, she is confident about graduating and hopeful concerning her future. It is noted in the memos that she speaks with confidence when she talks about graduating, but her tone changes to a more wistful and hopeful note when she thinks of her direction after high school. The students all speak with hopeful tones when discussing their futures despite being unsure of their directions. Adam stated,

So Twilight is restorative. It wasn't punitive. It was restorative. But you have to understand that because you offer somebody that way out. Remember they have a past and so are we always successful? No, but we gave them hope. A chance."

Independence

The independence code appeared five times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that Twilight offered more independence than in the traditional school. Twilight helped to foster a gradual independence within the students. Because the students were allowed

flexible schedules when it came to their learning, many of them adapted and thrived but some struggled. Gavin stated, *“Twilight is a breath of fresh air. You have options in Twilight, you have freedom and you have control. And that's, that's the, that's the beauty of Twilight.”*

While Greg felt,

Freedom. Too much freedom. I could come, go as I please. I could do what I want. When I pleased it was nice but it was too much. On me giving me that much freedom, you know, I wasn't working but Ms. S. she held me accountable, she called me every day, man. Everyday when she found out. I would be like Ms. S for real you doing too much. But if it wasn't for her man, I may not have made it because she was the only one kind of making sure that I did what I had to do because you know Twilight is freedom.

Motivation

The motivation code appeared twenty-two times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt more motivated in Twilight than in traditional school. Twilight helped to motivate students to graduate. Some of the students that attended Twilight lacked self-confidence and motivation to graduate high school. They entered the program because it gave them another opportunity, but they did not truly believe that they would complete. Twilight implemented various incentives and built strong teacher-student relationships to help maintain or increase the motivation of the students. The students would remark about how the teachers would announce or reward their accomplishments in Twilight. The students also began to anticipate and work toward the various incentives that their teachers would think up. Greg stated:

And then when I did something right or if I like, like I made good grades or something, or when I got out a promotion or something good happened at my job or at home. And Ms. S. made the biggest deal and my, she called my moms and my grandma, and she even called my pastor, my church it, I mean, yeah, she

made me, she made me feel like, like I like, I'm like, I'm doing something like I supposed to be doing. She made me feel like a, uh, like I like, I like, I ain't no screw up.

While Gwen described,

Um, like when we pass a class, they're announced our name on the internet. Uh, um, they give us, they put us in a raffle for gift cards when we, when we come to school, you know, good attendance on the school in school, on the program because we can work from home.

While Gavin and Gabby discussed how the patience and support of the staff was motivating to them. Some teachers felt how seeing their peers succeed within the program is motivation enough for the students. April stated, “*And this program has um, been a huge, uh, motivation for those people who were supposedly quote unquote non succeeders.*” While Adam discussed,

You know, we know you (the students) might've messed up, but guess what, we didn't give up on you (the students). So, you know, that kind of gave them that hope that they kind of jumped at and they used it and they use it as a driving force or, or probably think of the words like motivation. So that might be, you know, something to look at as well.

Adam felt strongly that the caring adults and graduate were motivation for Twilight students.

Taking Responsibility

The taking responsibility code appeared nine times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that they took more responsibility for their actions in Twilight than in traditional school. Twilight helped the students to take responsibility for actions. The students felt that they could take on more responsibility because they had so much support from their teachers. Greg mentions, “*There, there's a lot of people here helping me and I don't utilize them the way I should, you know, I mean, no cap (lie), they, they really be helping and I just, I just don't get it*

done.” Greg is accepting that he has not done what he needed to do to graduate and gives credit to Twilight for supporting their students. Gavin exclaimed, *“But again, that’s my fault. That’s not the teacher’s fault. That’s not anyone else’s fault, but mine.”* When discussing how long it is taking him to graduate from Twilight, Gavin is adamant that it is no one’s responsibility but his to make time to complete his classwork. As the teachers often stated Twilight helped to the students to focus on their learning and success without the distractions. The students taking responsibility helped to impact their motivation and confidence within Twilight. Many of the students expressed confidence in their abilities because of Twilight motivating them to take responsibility of their actions. Greg states,

Prepared. Had it prepared. Oh, um, yeah. Taught me about juggling all my stuff, you know, you know, I love school and basically when I left school school, even though Twilight was school, it wasn’t school, you know, so it taught me, you know, to juggle being in like a, like a, like a college, like school and work and family and just juggling all of that and how am I going to deal and get it done.

Twilight’s culture helped to impact the self-confidence of their students. Students reported about hope for their futures and are motivated to work toward their hopes.

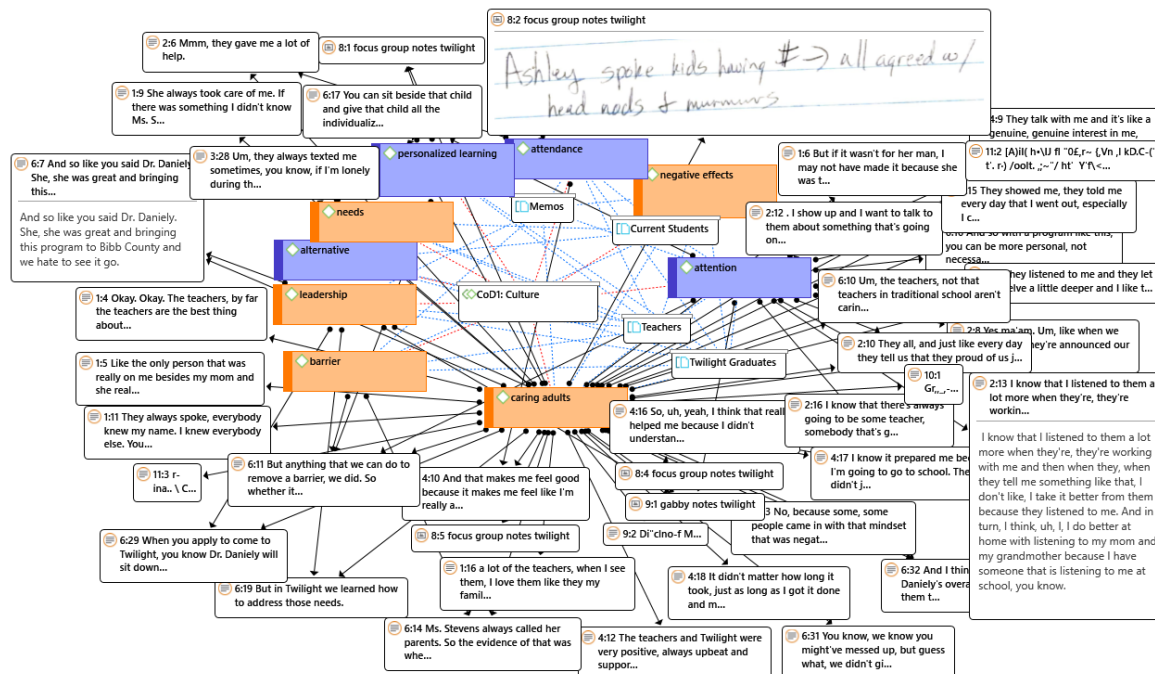
Based on the code groups, the researcher reexamines the transcripts to determine whether the categories are sufficiently descriptive and indicative of the data. Next examination of the data is reviewed for internal consistency of the categories of description. The categories of description are used to describe the range of different ways in which current students and graduates experience the Twilight program, including culture, self-efficacy, and teacher impact.

Culture

The first category of description to emerge was culture. Data from the student interviews, teacher focus group and researcher memos are presented in Figure 13 to visually represent the density of connections between these data sources and this category.

Figure 13.

Culture



The culture code appeared forty-nine times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that the culture of Twilight was different than their traditional schools. Throughout the interviews, personalized (individualized) learning was a widespread code that emerged frequently, which led to development of the descriptive category: culture. A personalized learning environment educates the whole child and takes into consideration the needs of the student, both in and out of school, and recognizes the impact that life circumstances may

have on the student's education (Zmuda, Curtis, and Ullman, 2015). During the focus groups, participants were asked about how the structure of the Twilight program support high school's students learning. April explained,

Personally, I think it made me more aware, Twilight made me more aware of what the students needed in the traditional setting, that there were barriers as Mr. Dent said to them, getting their education. I can't find childcare. I don't have a ride. I don't have that. Well, we, we offered all that at Twilight. And so those barriers were removed. You've already said that those barriers were removed. But then now I see as the graduation coach back in the traditional setting, we have to do the same thing. That barriers have to be removed. The kids come to school with all sorts of things. They're there, they're working and paying the electric, the lights, all that stuff. Or are they, um, they, they can't even get to school. But we, um, we in in Twilight, we provided the transportation, well, either the babysit and childcare services or the wraparound services, uh, it just speaks to where we are in our society though there is no family structure. Uh, you have, uh, I see more grandparents during the daytime in the traditional setting. Then I see parents. And so the structure is not there for children to be children. But in Twilight we learned how to address those needs.

Twilight created an environment where the students could attend and get their basic needs met so that they were able to concentrate on their learning for a period. Twilight did provide childcare, meals, and transportation but it also aided in getting the students and family additional wraparound services that they may need. Adam states,

But when you come to Twilight, like you see the students where they are, what are they individualized needs are and you can kind of tailor a quicker, quicker plan for them to be more successful.” Adam goes further, “But anything that we can do to remove a barrier, we did. So, whether it was making sure a child got here, tested, was taken home or whatever it may not be, and we'd done it and you, Ms. April done it, everybody in this table pretty much has done something extra to make sure that the barriers was eliminated.

Having to address the external needs of the students and ensuring that they receive additional support are key components of personalized learning environment. Twilight created a personalized learning environment that aided in the formation of more resilient culture.

A school community, with students that have close and informal relationships built with staff helps create a positive learning environment and sense of resiliency (Johnston, Cooch, & Pollard, 2004). Gwen affirmed this,

Um, I, I'm, um, I'm in my, I'm 20, so my, my little siblings, my and brother, they graduated. So, so I want to graduate like before them because I'm the oldest sister and I'm not finished yet, but I know I will and Twilight has, Twilight is giving me, you know, giving me that they're helping me with, um, finish school, no matter how many setbacks they, they always cheer me own and they're giving me more time. And when I need job application help, I can bring it there. I know that there's always going to be some teacher, somebody that's going to have some time to just sit with me.

It was noted that she hesitated and stumbled while speaking but the confidence was evident and that is partially due to the culture that Twilight created. Gwen does not doubt that she will finish school, and the support and steadfastness of Twilight has helped bolster her confidence.

Gabby describes,

“Well, it gives you focus. It's no distractions. You just going to go in there and you're gonna finish. You're gonna do your schoolwork and you're gonna go home. There's not a lot of people to be talking and hanging around with is not a lot of, um, drama. None of that is done. So, it's just focus business. That's why, you know, I would, I could do it in two years.” She goes on further to state, *“And Twilight kind of puts, kind of takes me out of all of that drama, which is what Dr. Daniely wanted. But I mean, for real....everybody here just doing work. That's all.”*

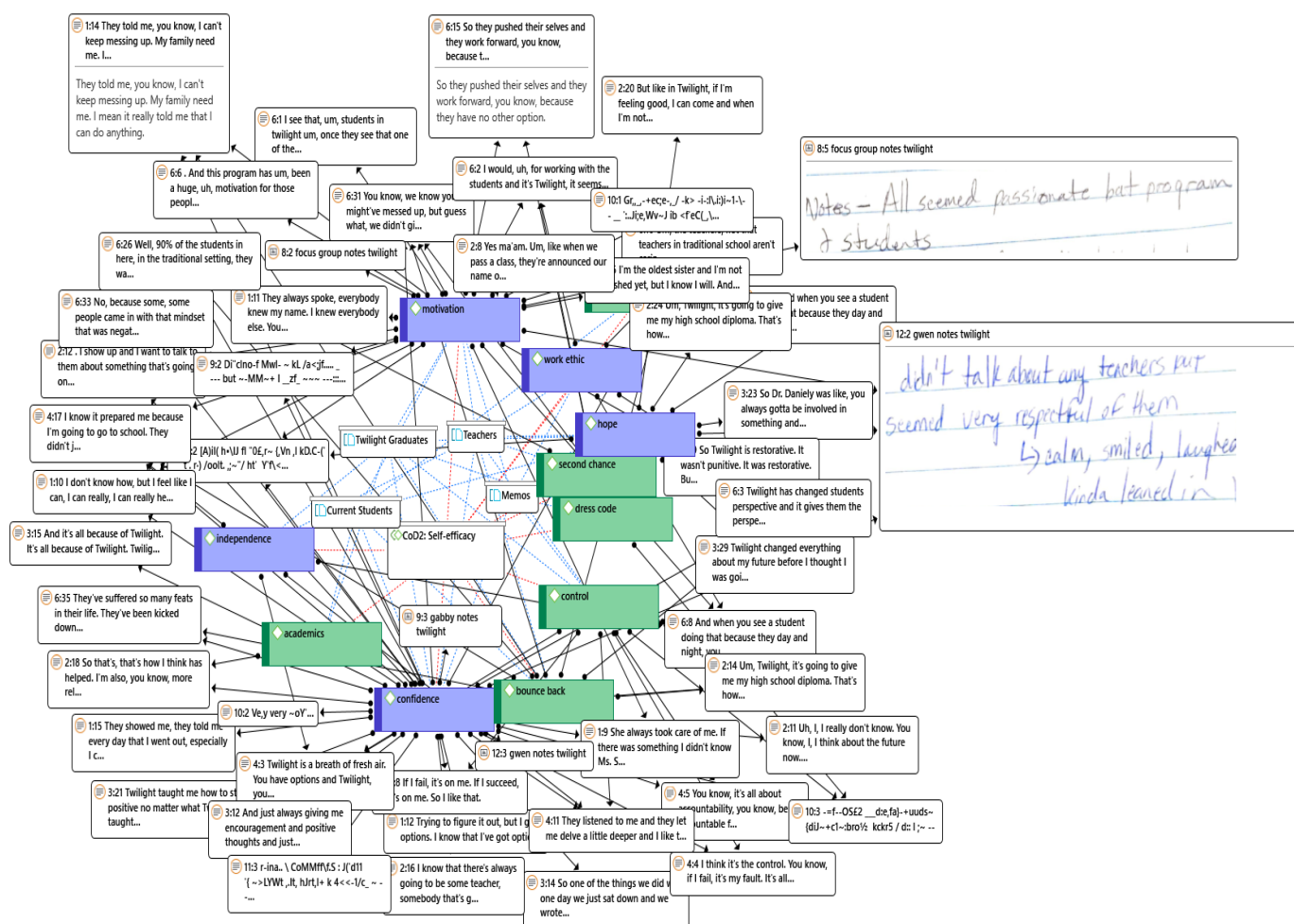
Gabby depicts a distraction free environment that allows students to focus on their learning. Students have developed or are in the process of developing a work ethic, so they are not indulging in socializing with peers while at Twilight. This connects with what the teachers stated about eliminating any barriers for the students. Twilight's personalized learning environment has created a positive learning culture where students feel comfortable to work and get celebrated for their work. While Gavin states,

Mmm, they conference with me. Like we review my memos and go over any information that I may have wrong or get confused. They give me encouragement but it's not phony or too much. When we complete a course, our name is announced on the intercom and some of the teachers bring extra gifts. I know Ms. April brings a cake and they give out gift cards. It makes it fun to complete a class. I don't mind coming here to work.

Providing students with personalized instruction and acknowledgment when they complete a task helps to build a positive community of caring learners. Gavin states that the recognitions did help to motivate, and he appreciated the efforts of the staff. These strategies to create a personalized learning environment truly impacted the culture of the Twilight program. A caring community that promotes the development of students to gain skills that will transfer their capacity for resiliency and self-efficacy (Johnston, Cooch, & Pollard, 2004). Thus, a personalized learning environment allowed for resiliency and self-efficacy to emerge.

Self-efficacy

The second category of description to emerge was self-efficacy. Data from the student interviews, teacher focus group and researcher memos are presented in Figure 14 to visually represent the density of connections between these data sources and the self-efficacy category of description.

Figure 14.*Self-efficacy*

The self-efficacy code appeared eleven times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that Twilight helped to develop their self-efficacy better than their traditional schools. When the participants were asked what do the teachers do to make the students feel good about themselves and their work, the most dominant descriptive category was self-efficacy. In terms of student educational success, students' lack of success could be related to negative

self-efficacy beliefs (Gold, 2010). The most prevalent coded families were building resiliency, developing a work ethic, and control of your learning.

During the interviews, the participants were encouraged to speak freely about their experiences, and this allowed for more of a stream of consciousness to emerge (Larsson & Holmström, 2007). The student's stated that no one had asked them before about their perspective on Twilight and how it could/have impacted them. The memos were able to capture participants' facial expressions and body language which often provided as much information as the verbal responses. While the focus group expounded on many of the same ideals that emerged during the interviews. The focus group data centered around teachers being transparent with expectations, being flexible, providing support, and having teachers invested in the students. The focus group questions were guided by the research questions and were open-ended (See Appendix C). The aim of a focus group is to comprehend, through reflection and dialogue, the relationship between the participants and the phenomenon being studied (Collier-Reed & Ingerman, 2013). The strength of a focus group is that it provides a more organic and relaxed environment than a one-on-one interview. This method provided a platform for the participants to engage in candid conversations about their experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012).

Building Resiliency

Resilience theory states that every person can overcome adversity if important protective factors are present in that person's life (Krovetz, 1999). For the students within Twilight, they are rebuilding their resiliency through a sense of belonging, kindness, independence, and accomplishment (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002). Greg stated, *"They call me whether it's just check up on me or say I love you. You know, I like that*

feeling and it gives me, uh, a sense of family and I feel like I've been missing that. I like that." It was noted that Greg smiled throughout, and his voice held a sense of awe when discussing his teacher's calling to express concern or interest, and not for school. He genuinely appreciated their calling, and he demonstrated that by staying with the program. Twilight provided the students a sense of belonging or community that helped to address their feelings of alienation and lack of self-worth. The program brought the students a level of stability that allowed them to feel comfortable to explore in their learning.

The students felt that in Twilight they had a family or a sense of belonging to the larger Twilight community. Not only did the students feel like they belonged to a community, but they appreciated the kindness being shown to them from the staff. Gavin stated,

The teachers seemed more like they're, you know, that they're positive of us being there and that they didn't come here for a check, but they came to make sure that you got what you need. You know what I'm saying? Did I get my job or need help? So that's neat. You know, they care. It's genuine.

The students trusted that the teachers/staff were there for their best interests. The teachers demonstrated their commitment and affection to the students, and it went beyond the walls of Twilight. From the focus group Ashley stated,

I had a student, she would call me, my mom kicked me out. Can you come pick me up? Where are you? I'm in Bonaire or I'm here... And I was like, okay, sit down in the car, what's going on?

The level of trust that developed between the staff and students at Twilight helped to build a sense of resiliency within the students. The students felt that no matter what their teachers had their backs, so they were comfortable with moving forward. Ashley continued, *"Twilight has changed students' perspectives and it gives them the perspective that I can finish that whatever happened in the past is now gone and I can make it to the*

finish line.” Adam further expounded, “...some people came in with that mindset that was negative or mindset that I’m a failure. We wanted to change their perspective.” The focus group participants were engaged and animatedly discussing their commitment to the students and the program.

Twilight also gave the students a sense of independence that they were not experiencing in traditional school. Gabby explains that she was engaged in regular verbal and physical altercations in the traditional school. She states that while some teachers did try to intervene, she was not receptive to them. Gabby expounded

Well, I was pregnant with my second kid, and I didn’t have time for the teachers and staff at regular school. My principal said I was too grown and told me about Twilight. Twilight was great for me. It allowed me to work, take care of my kids, and finish school on my own time.

Gabby, a student with greater independence and responsibilities than a typical teenager felt confined and restrained under the structure of a traditional setting. Given Gabby’s external situation, Twilight allowed her more freedom to create a schedule that best suited her needs.

Gwen also shared, *“It felt good to pass a quiz or test. But when I passed a class, Ms. S. bought me a full cake. It was silly but it felt good, really, really good.”* Twilight also validated their sense of accomplishment. By the teacher giving Gwen a cake for passing her class, she is acknowledging Gwen’s hard work. While Gwen spoke of receiving a cake, she giggled and smiled placing a hand over her mouth this indicates that this was a special memory. Gwen appreciated being acknowledged and responded by continuing to work through her classes despite her own personal challenges.

Developing a Work Ethic

The work ethic code appeared five times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that Twilight helped them to develop a work ethic better than traditional school.

In combination with building resiliency, Twilight helped students develop a work ethic. Students will work harder and persist longer when they have high self-efficacy (Jonson-Reid et. al., 2005 & Pajares, 2002). Gavin affirmed this,

“I had to work in Twilight. It wasn’t easy to complete Twilight, hold down a job, and take care of the family. When I was upset and didn’t want to come, Ms. April always said this is what I signed up for. I just had to work through it, but I wasn’t alone. I was working with a team, my Twilight team.” Greg also affirmed, “You know, I didn’t expect, you know, to really be on my own as far as like independently, you know, learning from the teachers. But, you know, it (Twilight) helped me to learn how to work and I needed to learn that, you know. By the way, Ms. Stevens, you know, one of the teachers there, she made me work. I needed that; I was lazy.”

Though Greg stated it as “Ms. Stevens...made me work,” he really meant that Ms. Stevens held him accountable. She and other teachers persistently called to check on the student’s wellbeing and to ensure they were working on their courses. The students appreciated being made to “work” because it demonstrated that the teachers cared about their wellbeing.

Additionally, Gwen stated,

“Twilight taught me how to work through when I failed. We were on our own, I mean teachers were there, but our learning was on our own. I failed a lot. I learned how to work through when I got upset. At school, I would get upset and yell at everyone. At Twilight it was all on me, I had to work harder.”

While she was discussing this topic, she seemed thoughtful and calm, and used her hands to emphasis her points by pointing at herself at various points. Again, Gwen indicates that

Twilight taught her how to work through failures, but it also taught her to be accountable for her learning. Gwen's body language indicates her passion for Twilight which is a component for her to persist in her work. Twilight allowed her the independence to discover that she is accountable for her own learning. Though Twilight did not require students to attend, the program maintained high attendance. Student would often choose to attend Twilight to work with a teacher because of the challenging assignments. In addition to the work, mandatory student led student-teacher conferences took place bi-monthly. Students felt that the school cared, held them to a higher level of accountability, and greater control of their learning than in previous schools.

When the teachers were discussing the student's work ethic their responses were surprising. April stated,

"But without parental support, you lose a lot of children because many of them had to support their families because the parents, uh, were not working, you know, for whatever reason. And then the children were, uh, were the ones who were, you know, out with their jobs, paying the bills and taking care of home. Like they were already adults. They were already working. When did they have time for school? And that's one of the reasons I firmly believed that we, we had so many in the beginning, but the numbers decreased as a result of the children having to take care of the families and not even being able to attend the non-traditional setting that we had in place for them, which was very positive and was a perfect place for them to achieve academic growth. But they couldn't do it if because they worked trying to provide for families."

While April is talking, Adam is leaned forward with his finger up, nodding wanting to interrupt and share his viewpoints. Ashley is nodding her head with her arms folded and murmuring 'amen' in agreement with April's point. Ann, the quietest in the group was waving her hands in agreement and saying yes repeatedly. All three had body language that indicated agreement with April's assessment of work ethic and the students. April felt that the students were working hard already and did not have enough parental support or

appreciation for their efforts. Ann expounded with *“It forced the students to be more independent...(students) put in a situation where I don't have this support right now, parent's not there. So, if I want it, I must get it.”* Ann's summary of their opinion of the situation indicates that the teachers felt that the students were hard workers but that the lack of parental support hurt their intrinsic motivation.

Control of Your Learning

The control code appeared nine times across the interviews for the enrolled students, students who graduated from Twilight, the teachers focus group and the researcher notes. The enrolled and graduated participants identified that they felt that Twilight allowed them to have more control than in traditional school. As explained by Greg,

Um, when I say control and I'm talking as if I'm the one that's in control and control of me getting to class control of making sure my work gets done, you know, they put it in my hands, so to speak.

As Greg speaks there is pride in his voice about having control of his learning. Greg taking greater control means he is worker harder and will persist longer with his tasks. Greg is having greater self-efficacy and therefore is finding greater success.

Gabby also affirmed,

Twilight taught me about time management and staying positive and Twilight has also given me love and I would love them. The teachers would give us calendars to keep up with our assignments and projects for the program. It also helped me when I needed to complete a class so that I could still graduate on time. I mean I wasn't waiting on anyone. I decided when how quickly or slowly that I finished a class. It helped get me ready for job corps.

Finally, Gavin confirmed,

“No, Twilight gave me the best option. It gave me the freedom to truly have control of my learning. I didn't have to come by a teacher's calendar, downtown tests, or bells. I decided that I wanted to work late at night, and I did without any problems. Twilight made me a better student.”

Gabby and Gavin both described enjoying the control that the self-paced curriculum gave them. They enjoyed having greater command and transferred the skills they gained to their post-secondary opportunities. Adam confirmed,

We had a student, I'm not going to call his name, but he'd done like 10, 12 classes in a matter of months. And when you see a student doing that because they day and night, you see them getting unlocked and resets and whatever they need. Um, you know it's, it makes a difference because that's like Ms. April said they be gainfully employed.

Ann revealed,

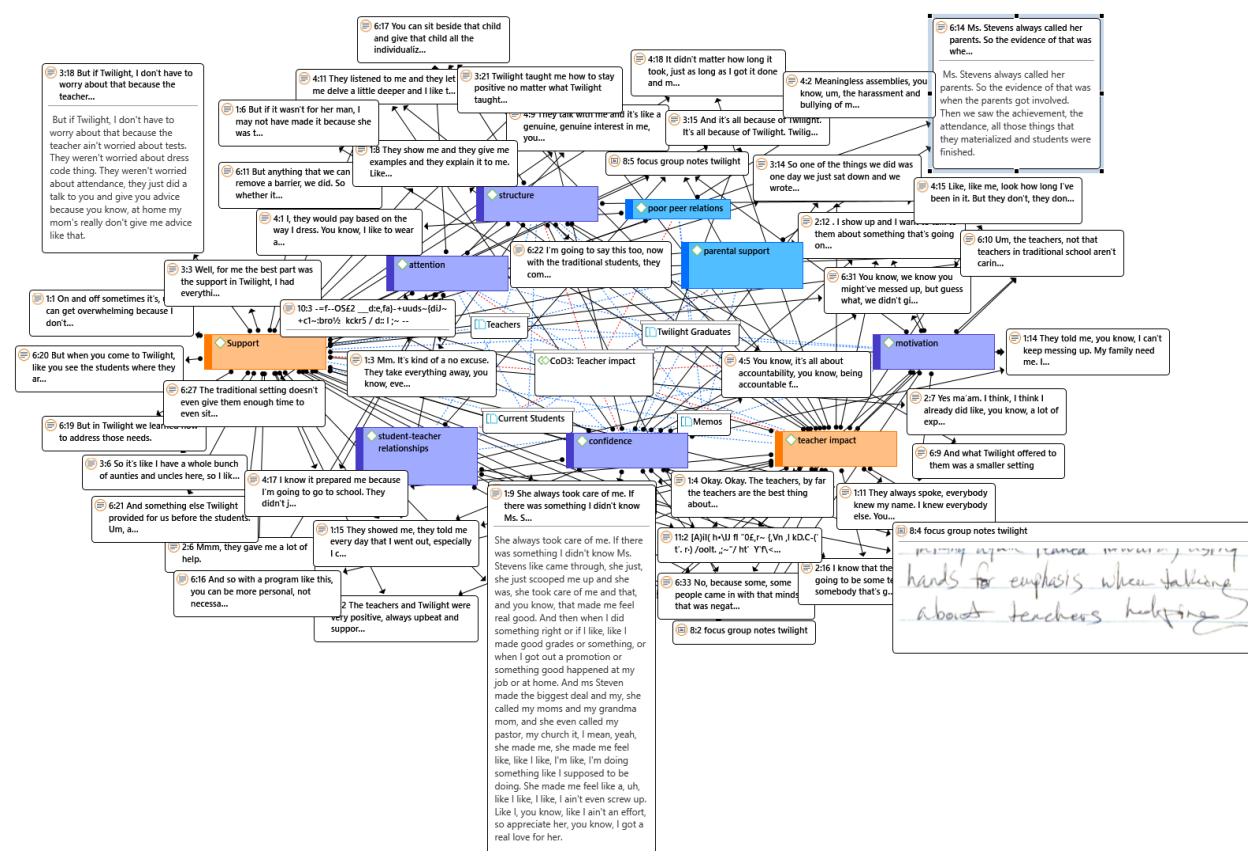
It was a student here and was not a behavior problem. Academics, everything was well but her attendance (meaning her tardies) were so bad. And she said, I'm not a morning person. It's that I cannot get up. You know. So, Twilight like actually gave.... them another outlet. Meaning I can't do school in daytime so I can come to Twilight like you know, do it in the evening and she did well.

Both scenarios that Adam and Ann described demonstrates the Twilight students' devotion to their own learning. In both situations the students understood what they needed, had developed resiliency, and felt supported within Twilight. The students felt that they could take an academic risk in Adam's situation by overcrowding his course schedule and in Ann's by enrolling in Twilight. The focus group data reinforced the data that with additional support at-risk students can increase their self-efficacy. Developing the self-efficacy of at-risk students could enhance their achievement rates (Gold, 2010).

Teacher impact

The final category of description to emerge was teacher impact. Data from the student interviews, teacher focus group and researcher memos are presented in Figure 15 to visually represent the density of connections between these data sources and the teacher impact category of description.

Teacher Impact



Um, they read my work and, and you know, some of, some of the teachers, you know, they're, fans. They like my art and poetry also, so we can talk and it's not just about school. And, um, I honestly, see like that they care about me and that's real cool. We'll link it (my work) back to some of the literature that I'm reading

in class and just making it fun and interesting for both of us. And that makes me feel good because it makes me feel like I'm really a part of the class.

When Gavin had to describe what his Twilight teachers did differently to help him, he did not describe academic help. He describes help with his external pursuits, but Twilight used his external interests to increase his academic motivation. By the teachers taking notice of Gavin's pursuits and including them in class they are keeping Gavin's interest in learning high. Gavin is eager to attend school to discuss his writing and that is exhibited by the excitement in his voice and his attempts to share his blog writings with the interviewer.

When Gwen spoke of her regular schoolteachers, she was short and dismissive. When asked about her Twilight teachers,

Yeah. They're more chill, willing to listen and have a good time. I mean, it's still not the same as being in regular school. Or hanging with your friends, but they're willing to, you know, if I want to come in and just talk, let's like just talk. I show up and I want to talk to them about something that's going on personally. They'll stop and just listen to me and they'll, they'll try to cheer me up and we sit and tell jokes. And uh, I appreciate that. You know, that they talk to me like I'm a person. I'm not just someone that has to pass a test so that they can get a checkmark or, or something like that. They listened to me.

She spoke in respectful and glowing terms. She made emphasis with her hands when making a point about herself and maintained some eye contact to convey her seriousness.

Gwen discusses how in Twilight the teachers are willing to make time to talk with the kids about their passions and concerns. Gabby states,

Well, it's like I said, the teachers and Twilight never doubted. Never. Even when, when I was feeling like depressed or sad and I was doubting myself, they never doubted at me. And they always spoke about, you know, one mistake doesn't have to be a forever mistake and they always talk about I need to just bounce back. And they always talked about just try to keep it positive and that that really helped because I get really sad sometimes and real depressed.

Gabby's assertion that the teachers never doubt is indication of the bond between the teachers and students at Twilight. The students knew that the teachers supported them

throughout, and the students responded by preserving. Gabby's confident and firm tone indicates how convinced she is in her teacher's support. Greg summarized the teachers as,

Okay. Okay. The teachers, by far the teachers are the best thing about the program. I mean, they go above and beyond to show us how much they care. I mean, I mean, Ms. April, she would call every day and be like, D, where are you? D I'm here and no cap. That felt good. I knew somebody cared no matter what Ms. April care. And, um, I love that woman to the day. I die. I love that woman. They call me whether it's just check up on me or say I love you. You know, I like that feeling and it gives me, uh, a sense of family and I feel like I've been missing that. I like that.

Twilight teachers by being persist in calling students and demonstrating kindness the teachers were modeling resilient behaviors to the students. Greg felt connected to his teachers and Twilight through the persist structure and support. Besides providing the academic and emotional support, teachers also modeled the desired resilient behaviors for students (Waxman, Padron, & Gray, 2004).

When speaking about the differences between Twilight and traditional teachers, Ashley stated.

Um, the teachers, not that teachers in traditional school aren't caring, but these teachers were coming from their regular jobs to come here to do this extra work here. And so those teachers were motivated to make sure that these children succeeded, and the children understood that. The children had my number, they could text and call me anytime. So, they understood that we wanted them to, we wanted them to succeed. And so, um, that you're asking about student achievement, they needed to be in an alternative setting and that, and Twilight was that alternative setting. And they're still asking, can I go to Twilight, Ms. Ashley.

As Ashley was talking, Adam and Ann leaned forward as though to interrupt only to lean back nodding in agreement with her statements. April was making clapping hands and murmuring noises of agreement. They collectively laughed at the part where Ashley states that the students have her personal cell number. Their laughter indicates that the students all have the personal contact information for their teachers providing additional support

that the student-teacher relationship is stronger in the alternative setting. Teachers building relationships with students help the students to feel a connectedness toward the school and want to engage in more school opportunities (Cordell, 2011). Twilight teachers had a high level of success in building and maintain relationships with their students. That is evident by the students' desire to apply for Twilight and their high engagement with their teachers within the program.

Outcome Space

The outcome space depicts potential logical relationships between the categories of description and the topics of interest (Kahn, 2014). The relationship between the categories and topics are summarized in table 5 revealing the resulting outcome space from this study. The outcome space consists of emergent themes described as categories, code families, representative statements (quotations) and memos organized by topics of interests. The creation of an outcome space table is adapted from a recent article that discusses the implications of using phenomenography as a qualitative approach to learn about major challenges in science education (Hans & Ellis, 2019). These researchers created an outcome space table comprised of categories, descriptions, and representative statements, that greatly influenced the outcome space design and data analysis process in their study and seemed like an appropriate way to present the outcome space for this study.

Table 5.*Resultant Outcome Space Table*

What are the qualitatively different ways in which students' experience the Twilight program?		
<u>Categories</u>	<u>Descriptions</u>	<u>Representative Statements</u>
Culture	1. Personalized learning	Quotations So with Twilight they have a daycare down the hall so I can check on my child. They have meals here. So if I forget to get my kids something to eat, they can eat while I'm doing my work and the teachers really know that I'm working, so they don't mess with me and I trust everybody here. – Gabby
	2. Flexibility in attendance/classes	But like in Twilight, if I'm feeling good, I can come and when I'm not feeling good, I can work from home. So it's worked out for me. It's taken me longer. But that's not the program's fault. That's my fault. – Gwen
	3. Support System	The teachers and Twilight were very positive, always upbeat and supportive. – Gavin So I can honestly say that I saw the structure of Twilight was different. Like when you walk in the door, it wasn't about bells and whistles and classes and all of that. They talked to you first, made sure if you were hungry you got food. – Gavin She always took care of me. If there was something I didn't know Ms. Stevens like came through, she just, she just scooped me up and she was, she took care of me and that, and you know, that made me feel real good. – Greg
Self-efficacy	1. Resilience	And it's all because of Twilight. It's all because of Twilight. Twilight, you know, introduced me to all of this. But more than that too, I said I could do it no matter what. – Gwen
	2. Work ethic	I know it prepared me because I'm going to go to school. They didn't judge me. They allowed me to develop my confidence in a voice or they never, they never rushed me. They allow me to do it in my own time – Gavin
	3. Self-confidence	

		So I believe I'm mentally stronger and more prepared for college or full or for whatever happens next. They show me how to kind of bounce back or, um, or you know, my Ninja way. You know, making sure I never give up. That's they always talk about and never give up – Gavin
		I would, uh say, for working with the students and Twilight, it seems that they put more work ethic into Twilight than at school cause it gives them another opportunity when they leave their, um, homeschool, they probably felt like they didn't have any more options. - Ann
Teacher impact	1.Interest in students 2.Aiding with grit 3.Motivational	You know, the teachers there, they, they definitely care for you. Not about a paycheck. They definitely care. – Gavin
		So you know, that kind of gave them that hope that they kind of jumped at and they used it and they use it as a driving force or, or probably think of the words like motivation. So that might be, you know, something to look at as well – Adam
		It didn't matter how long it took, just as long as I got it done and my family was proud no matter what. And Twilight really focused on that with me at this time. – Gavin
		And you know, I like music so maybe I could figure out a way to put that together. But the fact that I even, I'm even thinking like that now is something that I didn't do before Twilight before then. - Greg

This highlights the qualitatively different ways in which students experience the Twilight program. Teacher impact is most limited way of experiencing Twilight, with educators focusing on motivation and perseverance. Culture describes the most complex and complete understanding of the experiences of Twilight. The category goes beyond teachers having an interest or motivating students to an encompassing personalized learning

environment where the students gained a sense of community and another support system. This environment is beneficial to both staff and students.

Quality of Evidence

To ensure the quality of evidence in this study, the researcher employed triangulation of data sources: (1) memos; (2) interviews; (3) a focus group; as well as triangulation of these sources with the existing literature. Additionally, the researcher also used code reports to aid in the analyzing of the data. The data sources were thoroughly reviewed allowing the researcher to quote, code, and make memos while dissecting and comparing the data. Further, member checking was conducted one week after interviews and again after the focus group to ensure alignment between transcriptions and participants' experiences. The researcher ensured credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through a rich analysis formulated by a triangulation of the data. The researcher was able to write an exhaustive and thick collective description of the phenomenon being examined.

Summary

A phenomenographic study entails coherence between research questions and the phenomenon being studied (Kahn, 2014). Consequently, the goal of this study was to understand the qualitatively different ways that students' experience Twilight by developing an outcome space with representative statements from teachers, students, graduates, and researcher memos to elicit their experiences about Twilight. Hence, this chapter uncovered the variety of perceptions by students and teachers in alternative education program, like Twilight. Accordingly, this chapter analyzed the variances surrounding the ways that students' experience Twilight. Overall, this qualitative study

portrayed the relationships between three descriptive categories: teacher impact, culture, and self-efficacy, that influence student perceptions of themselves and their future in a program like Twilight.

More specifically, this study showed that teachers are more impactful on student perceptions in an alternative program. In fact, teachers must build self-efficacy and resiliency within the students so that the students understand that they have the capacity to complete the class or graduate high schools. Additionally, the teachers have to model self-efficacy for the students through small staff challenges the students get to watch their teachers demonstrate resiliency and self-efficacy.

The use of a phenomenographic research tradition was beneficial for revealing the array of participant experiences of the phenomenon. As a result, the findings from this study will aid other educators, schools, programs, and districts in their research for an alternative education program, like Twilight. Additionally, the results will provide insight into student perceptions for other alternative education programs. Finally, by exploring and sharing experiences of the participants, this study has helped identify and deepen existing understanding of, student perceptions of themselves and their futures in an alternative education program, like Twilight.

Chapter Five

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine what it was like to participate in an alternative education program, like Twilight, and explore how that experience impacted the student perceptions of themselves and their vision of the future. This qualitative study included eight participants, four participants were teachers who participated in a focus group, and two current and two former Twilight students who participated in individual interviews. This qualitative study was guided by the following research question:

1. What are the qualitatively different ways in which students' experience the Twilight program?

This chapter will include the summary of findings, implications of findings for educational practice, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Through analysis of the data sources, three descriptive categories emerged that reflected the qualitatively different ways the Twilight students experience the program: culture, teacher impact, and self- efficacy. As a result, the findings presented in this chapter will be organized around these descriptive categories.

Culture

A caring school community promotes the development of students to gain skills that will increase their capacity for resiliency and self-efficacy within their lives (Johnston, Cooch, & Pollard, 2004). Similarly, the study participants who received positive interventions noted that despite their academic or behavior concerns still wanted to persist through school (Kelchner et. al., 2017). Likewise, the most prevalent perceptions across all

study participants revealed strong perceptions of differences in the school culture within the Twilight program compared to traditional school cultures experienced previously.

Given this, the Twilight students explained, that during the traditional school, there is not enough time to provide the attention to all the students, but at Twilight the smaller classes allow teachers to build richer relationships with their students. Conversely, after the students enrolled in Twilight, teachers witnessed student's willingness to listen and take ownership of their learning. This constitutes strong evidence demonstrating the impact of Twilight culture had on the student's resiliency and self-efficacy and impacting their perceptions of themselves and their future.

Consistent with the student's assertions, the teachers stated, that Twilight allowed them more freedom in developing the individualized learning environment. Smaller class sizes and individualized instruction has the greatest impact on school culture (Kallio & Sanders, 1999). In addition to impacting school culture, an individualized learning environment helps increase student resiliency and accountability (Johnston, Cooch, & Pollard, 2004). Likewise, the teachers experienced better student-teacher relationships and noted an improved work ethic on the part of the students.

Subsequently, the teachers noted that the students enjoyed the individual assignments and self-paced timelines. A positive learning climate for an alternative program should feature small class sizes, individual assignments, self-paced timelines, standards-based assessments, and informal student-teacher interactions (Raywid, 1983). Consistent with Raywid's assertions, Twilight offered the students small class sizes, individual assignments, self-paced timelines, standards-based assessments, and informal student-teacher interactions. In fact, across the data sources, the participants spoke

positively about the culture of the Twilight program and described how the culture of the Twilight program impacted their student's perceptions of themselves and their futures.

Teacher Impact

When the student participants were asked to describe the best things about the Twilight program, the most prevalent responses referenced the teachers. More specifically, the student participants reflected on their experiences with their Twilight teachers and how both the teachers and their experiences with the teachers impacted them. Teachers with a positive mentality and a belief that their students can learn have an intense effect on student resiliency and self-efficacy (Goldstein & Brooks, 2007; Zimmerman, 2000). Additionally, teachers modeling resilient behaviors desired from their students plays an essential role in providing support for students (Waxman, Padron, & Gray, 2004). Consistent with the literature, the participants' descriptions and explanations of their perceptions were centered on the importance of their relationships with their Twilight teachers.

A key role of a teacher is to support students through their struggles while developing them into resilient and caring students (Waxman, Padron, & Gray, 2004). Student-teacher relationships help students feel connected with their school community and makes them want to engage in more opportunities (Cordell, 2011). Moreover, teachers and students appreciate a better relationship because it increases the trust (Cook, 2003). Furthermore, a positive relationship helps the perception of the schools within the community (Grant, 2011).

Consistent with the research, the teachers in this study listened, cared, and engaged the students in a manner that the students were not receiving in traditional school. One of

the most frequently discussed areas of support for the students were their teachers. More specifically, the teachers altered their approach to individualized learning by placing the needs of the students at the center of the learning process. In fact, school changed from one-size-fits-all model to a tailored and relevant real-life learning experienced based on the individual needs, abilities, and beliefs of the individual students while helping them to increase their resiliency and self-efficacy. Thus, the students experienced support throughout their Twilight experience, as teachers modeled resiliency and listened to their emotional concerns, the structure of the program ensured that their more basic and childcare needs were met. Based on the information provided by the informants there was strong evidence demonstrating the support and influence the teachers had on students' perceptions of themselves and their future.

Self-Efficacy

When the participants were asked to give examples about Twilight, the most prevalent responses were centered around self-efficacy. More specifically, the participants reflected on their confidence, abilities, and work ethic and how that improved or increased when they enrolled at Twilight. Self-efficacy adds to the degree of success in tasks that individuals endeavors. Students with higher self-efficacy work harder and persist longer (Jonson-Reid et.al, 2005 & Pajares, 2002). Students with higher self-efficacy are less likely to participate in risky behaviors that negatively affect school success (Gold, 2010). All participants agreed they had the ability to make better decisions, but Twilight gave them the motivation to make the smarter choices.

In the traditional classroom model, students that have negative academic performances are likely to have their belief in their academic ability diminish (Jonson-Reid

et. al., 2005). In contrast, the Twilight provided them a positive learning environment where the emphasis is on more intimate student-teacher relationships and flexible schedules (Johnston, Cooch, and Pollard, 2004). Students and teachers in this study experienced more personal relationships with each and both felt that the relationships contributed to the enhance student work ethic and resiliency. More specifically, the variety of methods that teachers communicated, enabled the students to have more control over their learning process. In fact, many argue that the goal of alternative programs, is to transition students successfully back to the traditional school or graduation (Kelchner et. al., 2017). Similarly, in this study the students did not want to transition back to traditional school, but graduate and gain skills that were relevant to their lives.

Further, students who struggle with asking for help, regulating their learning, or managing their time will have lower levels of self-efficacy (Gold, 2010). The participants all noted that they did not feel that they could achieve success in traditional school because of time management, not having flexible schedules, or not receiving enough help during the school day. More specifically, the teachers discussed how traditional school struggles to aid students with low self-efficacy because of the focus on deadline, strict schedules, and not having enough time to build personal student-teacher relationships in the day. Thus, in Twilight, students can receive that attention that helps to build their self-efficacy and resiliency.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations to this study were identified with a critical review and interpretation of their impact on the study. The limitations to the current research include: the number of participants and scope of the study. Though small samples are standard for qualitative

research and the participants were selected through purposive sampling, it is likely that a larger number of participants would have yielded greater variation. Additionally, although the participants provided thick descriptions of their perceptions of themselves during Twilight, increasing the number of participants would likely enrich the data between the participants and the phenomenon. Similarly, expanding the scope of the research to include other Twilight or alternative education programs would provide additional variation that would deepen the understanding of the phenomenon and enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the data.

In summary, by recognizing the limitations, a more complete understanding of the environment surrounding the results of this study was established. Additionally, opportunities have been formed for future researchers of this topic to challenge their beliefs, assumptions, and preconceptions.

Implications of Findings

The results of this study have implications for schools or districts interested in establishing an alternative education program like Twilight. Research prior to this study validates the impact between students' perceptions of themselves and self-efficacy (Griffin, Richardson, & Lane, 1994). The present study affirmed that students' perceptions of themselves and their future are impacted by not only self-efficacy but the student-teacher relationship. The student participants repeatedly cited their relationships with their teachers as the individuals in their life that continued to motivate them to complete their work or check on their wellbeing. Students and teachers were able to connect in a more positive manner due to the smaller class sizes and flexible scheduling. Students were able to make better choices and grades because the school allowed them more flexibility and

control in their learning. Teachers modeling resiliency helped the students to understand how to overcome their personal barriers or mistakes. Results from the present study provide clarity and understanding of the impact of an alternative education program, like Twilight. This study also gives insight into the relative importance of the variables in predicting alternative school success.

Alternative education programs need to be selective when hiring teachers for their programs. Teachers working in alternative education should be compassionate, have high academic standards, and a willingness to build a relationship with their students. Often students in alternative education programs are hoping to build a connection with their teachers. The students are looking for that trusted adult or environment that will allow the students to feel safe enough to learn. When students lack trust in their teachers, the students will ignore and refuse to listen to their teachers. It is imperative that teachers take time to build relationships with their students so that the students will trust the teachers. It is the teachers' job to build the relationships with their students, so that the students' trust their teachers. In the alternative setting, teachers have a harder job in gaining students trust because of the students' past issues in school. Alternative education teachers must work twice as hard to gain similar results as the traditional school.

As a researcher that worked in an alternative education program, I realized the challenge it is to provide resources for at risk high school students. Typically, the students are older in alternative education programs, and require more resources that help them with graduation and their post-secondary plans. Often for these students, high school is too late, therefore I decided to transition to middle school. I begin discussing with parents and students their options for completing high school. Often the parents and students are

eager to discuss an alternative to traditional school because their students have lost their motivation to continue in school. In middle school, I can capture the attention of the students and explain that there are a multitude of ways to graduate high school. It is essential that we inform and explain all the options that students have to graduate.

However, this study did not fully support the literature on student perceptions of themselves and their own lack of success. Some research reported that students connected failure in the traditional setting with poor attendance or lack of flexibility (Gold, 2010). While attendance and flexibility are considered key components to completing traditional school, those were not shown to be significant. Instead, student-teacher relationships and self-efficacy were the most important variables in students' perceptions of themselves and their future.

Recommendations for Future Research

Findings from this study elicit the following questions about future research:

1. Would the emergent descriptive categories in this study apply to other alternative education programs, like Twilight?
2. How has the role of the administrator shifted in an alternative education program, like Twilight as opposed to traditional schools?

Recommendations based on these questions are provided in the following paragraphs.

Descriptive Categories

Student perceptions of themselves and their future in an alternative education program should be explored on a larger scope including a variety of alternative education programs. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to compare the descriptive categories from this study to future findings to determine if there is a correlation. Having corresponding

descriptive categories would provide more credible endorsements to future alternative education programs.

Administrator Roles

This study revealed several changes for teachers and students. The existing literature and participants in this study all assert that leadership was a key component in their individual and program success of Twilight. Thus, more research is needed to determine what are the components and how it impacts the students, from the administrators' perspective. Additionally, understanding the administrators' perspective would better equip the district to support an alternative education program, like Twilight.

Each recommendation for future research may yield new data that improves an alternative education program. This study is only a small sample on the impact of an alternative education program can have on student perceptions of themselves and their future. Consequently, as future research expands understanding of this phenomenon, there is great potential for that research to positively alter how leaders and schools initiate and navigate an alternative educational program.

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Appendix A

TEACHER FOCUS GROUP INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Study: The Twilight Program: A Phenomenographic Study

Researcher's Contact Information: Chanda Crawley, 478-960-0812;

ccrawl11@students.kennesaw.edu

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Chanda Crawley of Kennesaw State University. Before you decide to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Description of Project

The purpose of the study is to examine student perspectives of themselves and their future as a result of participating in the Twilight program.

Explanation of Procedures

You are being asked to answer questions and discuss the student-teacher dynamic and teacher perspective at the Twilight program as part of a focus group with other teachers from the Twilight program. This focus group will also be captured using a video recording application.

Time Required

The focus group will take approximately 30 minutes.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no known risks anticipated as a result of participating of taking part in this study.

Benefits

While there are no direct benefits to participants in this study, information gained from your participation could support the continuation of instructional strategies or environmental contexts that could benefit the students and teachers. In addition, this study will likely benefit the local educational agency (public school district) by offering data that could be used to continue and/or improve the operation of the alternative school.

Compensation

No compensation will be offered as a result of participating in this study.

Confidentiality

The results of this focus group will be confidential. The researcher will use of pseudonyms as unique identifiers such as participant A to ensure that data collected cannot be associated with an individual participant in the focus group data. None of the data collected, analyzed, or summarized during this focus group will be distributed in any way that will include names or identifying information.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation

The criteria for the selection of participants in this focus group are teachers who have worked Twilight a year or more, are representative of male and female genders and who do not have a prior relationship with the researcher. .

Statement of Understanding

The purpose of this research has been explained to me and I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I have the right to stop participation at any time without penalty. I understand that this research has no known risks, and I will not be identified.

Signed Consent

I agree and give my consent to participate in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

Participant Name and Date

Appendix B

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Participant ID _____

Date _____

Script

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. As you know the purpose of this study is to explore student perceptions of themselves and their future as a result of participating in an alternative educational program, called Twilight.

Before I begin, I would like everyone's consent to audio record this focus group, so I may accurately transcribe the information you all convey. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used for educational purposes. This focus group will take about 30 minutes and will include some focused questions regarding the students' perceptions of Twilight and its impact on its future and themselves. Please, feel free to share any information relevant to the questions asked.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

Interview Questions:

1. Can you tell me about some of things you enjoy doing? Do you have some favorite apps that you can recommend?
2. Can you tell me what led you to enroll in the Twilight program? How long have you been in the program?
3. What challenges did you face when attending traditional schools?
4. How would you describe the Twilight program to others who might be interested in attending?
5. What would you say are the best things about the Twilight program? Can you give me some examples?
6. What things in the Twilight program have not worked well for you?
7. Why types of things do you teachers do that make you feel like you can do the school work? Can you give examples?
8. What do your teachers to that make you feel good about yourself and what you are doing? Can you give examples?
9. How has being in the Twilight program changed how you see your future?
10. What do teachers in the Twilight program do differently from the teachers you had in traditional school? How have those things helped you?
11. What do you hope to do once you graduate from the Twilight program?
12. In what ways do you think the Twilight program prepared you to do those things?

Appendix C

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Participant ID _____

Date _____

Script

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. As you know the purpose of this study is to explore student perceptions of themselves and their future as a result of participating in an alternative educational program, called Twilight.

1. I appreciate you signing the Informed Consent form and just want to remind you that your participation in this focus group is voluntary and that you can stop at any time. This focus group will take about 30 minutes and will include questions regarding your perceptions about how the structure of the Twilight program supports high school student's learning?

Please, feel free to share any information relevant to the questions asked.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

Focus Group Questions:

1. How long have you all been teachers? Have you been in teachers in traditional educational settings? How long have you been a teacher in the Twilight program? Does anyone have experience teaching in other alternative or non-traditional schools?

2. Based on your experiences teaching in the Twilight program, how has Twilight positively influenced student academic growth? Can you offer some examples?
3. In your opinion, has Twilight negatively influenced student academic growth? Can you offer some examples?
4. How would you describe the change in teacher roles and expectations within traditional schools versus the Twilight program?
5. In your opinion, in what ways does the structure of the Twilight program support high school student's learning?
6. How do you see as strategies utilized within the Twilight program that support students in ways that they were not supported within a traditional school setting?
7. What supports are in place within the Twilight program that help students overcome the challenges they faced in traditional school environments?

Before we conclude this focus group, is there anything else anyone would like to share? Thank you all for your time and sharing your experiences with me today.

Appendix D

STUDENT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Study: The Twilight Program: A Phenomenographic Study

Researcher's Contact Information: Chanda Crawley, 478-960-0812;

ccrawl11@students.kennesaw.edu

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study conducted by Chanda Crawley of Kennesaw State University. Before you decide to participate in this study, you should read this information and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Description of Project

The purpose of the study is to examine student perspectives of themselves' and their future while in the Twilight program.

Explanation of Procedures

You are being asked to answer questions and discuss your experiences and strategies that have helped or not helped you during the Twilight program and how the program has prepared you for the future.

Time Required

Each interview will be designed to take approximately 30 minutes.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no known risks anticipated because of taking part in this study.

Benefits

Information gained from this study may help your teachers in the Twilight program understand how to further support your educational needs and those of your classmates. Compensation

No compensation will be offered as a result of participating in this study.

Confidentiality

The results of this participation will be confidential. The use of pseudonyms (fake names) such as participant A will be used in these individual interviews.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation

To participate in study, you must either be currently enrolled in the Twilight program or have graduated from the program within the past year and must be between 18-22 years old. Finally, you must have no prior relationship with the researcher.

Statement of Understanding

The purpose of this research has been explained to me and I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can stop participation at any time I understand that the research has no known risks, and I will not be identified.

Signed Consent

I agree and give my consent to participate in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

Participant Name and Date

Appendix E

June 12, 2019

Chanda Crawley

Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, GA

Dear Ms. Crawley,

The Research Committee met to review your request to conduct research in the Bibb County School District. On behalf of Dr. Curtis L. Jones, Superintendent of Schools, the committee “*has approved*” your request to conduct research. Please use this letter as verification for Kennesaw State University as proof that you have permission to conduct the research outlined in your proposal.

Please provide the Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Accountability Office a copy of your research findings once completed so we may have a record of all research carried in our district.

Congratulations as you approach the successful completion of all of your doctorate!

Sincerely,



Anthony Jones

Director, Research, Evaluation, Assessment and Accountability

Bibb County School District